

Summer Shock

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by Thorne Lee

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FOREWORD

The Shakespearian Festival can no longer be claimed as a unique institution by any one region or nation. It has become an international phenomenon. The Festival which provides the setting for *Summer Shock* resembles in certain physical aspects one of the most famous of America's Shakespearian theatres, but the story belongs to no specific area. All incidents portrayed in this novel are fictitious. The characters are entirely imaginary.

Respectfully, to ANGUS BOWMER and
all of the others who have made
the Oregon Shakespearian Festival a
unique experience in “theatre under the
stars.”

PART ONE

I

THE CHURCH, WITH ITS FIERCE BLACK FINGER OF A steeple pointing crookedly at the sky, stood like a lonely old prophet on the hilltop, withdrawn from the encroachment of the city, gaunt and terrible, shepherding not a live congregation, but a community of death. On the slope above and behind it were silent rows of grave-stones, tilted, grotesque, sinking at weird angles into the sodden ground.

The yard was poorly kept. Grass grew abundantly between the church and the untended graves. The boy who lay in the deep rearward shadow of the slanted roof, full length on his back, staring at the misty night sky, was sensually involved with this abundance, but he could not have put his feeling into reasonable thought. His fingers curved into the soft moist turf, and he felt the throb of warm veined life in his tight grasp, and this was no illusion, for the beat and the warmth were the expectant rising of his own pulse. . . .

She'll come. She'll always come. Let it be wrong, let her be scared, but she'll come. . . .

He knew this girl. She did not like this place, between the church and the cemetery, between the holy and the dead, but she would come to him, here or anywhere.

He sat up, restlessly, looking backward at the strangely human shadows of the gravestones. He flung himself back against the soft grass, sighing deeply. Wrong? How could this place be wrong? It was the only free place in the world. Cities, people, parents were a stiff-legged army

opposed to all boys and girls, to youth, to freedom—but none of the grown people, or the young either, ever came here at night, hardly ever in the daytime. It was the end of the earth, a tropical island. It was utterly alone, unseen, a well of warm infinite darkness.

He did not put his feeling into these words, but it was written thus in the volume of his sigh, in the slow rise and fall of his chest.

He waited. The girl would come. She had been late on other nights, finding new roundabout ways, new sidewalks, imagining that she might be watched, that someone other than themselves would care to trace their devious paths, would be interested in a boy and girl who were known to be only daytime friends, nothing more, holding hands in drugstore booths, racing the old man's car to the shrieking delight of other friends, other lovers—

Lovers? He sat up again, crossing his arms on his bony knees, leaning his head against them. He was not sure he liked that word. Lovers. It had so many different meanings. He was too young to think in complexities. He thought with his feelings, and he could feel love, though he could not analyse it. Above all, he could not worry about love the way she worried.

He lifted his head again, listening acutely for her whistle from the foot of the hill or the flicker of her flashlight from the trees at the edge of town.

For a girl she sure had nerve. It was not the night she was afraid of. It was not the future, either, come to think of it. They had agreed to meet the future as it came, whenever it happened.

What else, then? . . . She always came to him breathlessly, though she was never running; she lay against him panting, trembling, unable to speak at first. Once he had thought the breathlessness was her eagerness for him, but later he knew it for an uneasiness of spirit.

She felt she was being watched, she'd said once. Watched? Who would watch them? Who would care?

“Maybe the angels, she'd said, and he had laughed in her face. When they lay apart, quietly, not laughing, she would try seriously to explain her fears. For one thing, she did not like the drug-store where their meetings were arranged, the openness of the phone booths. Could they go on using the same telephone code without discovery? “Hello, Jimmy. . . . The folks are gone for to-night, and I just got bored for conversation. . . . Oh, just down at the Red Top having a coke. Guess I'll go home. See you tomorrow, Jimmy. . . .”

But it was never tomorrow when she saw him; it was always tonight.

There were so many people in the drug-store, she complained—the high school and university crowd. It was a kind of hub for the night life of the town. What if someone followed her out of the store and saw her not going home? She had trembled uncontrollably at the thought.

His own arguments against her fears were simple and reasonable. A girl had a mind of her own. A girl might go for a walk at night. Anyway, her folks had never so much as asked her a question. That meant they knew nothing.

As for his own folks, he could go to hell on a roller coaster for all the questions they would ask.

She always pressed her hand gently over his lips when he swore. It has wrong to swear in this place, she said. So solemn and quiet. Like swearing in a church.

Why can't we swear in a church, he had argued, laughing in her ear, if we can do all the rest—

That was the night she had struck him across the mouth—not in anger, only to hush his talk. To laugh made the whole thing wrong. She did not want it to be wrong. It had to be right. She was a funny girl. . . .

To-night he had waited longer than he could ever remember waiting before. He grew a little chill and hugged his knees, yet the night was warm, alive with the smell and the whisper of late spring. He felt a greater loneliness than he had ever felt before, and it made him suddenly

conscious of how much this girl was a part of himself. He knew that he was not a man, a person, without her. Every night, when she left him, half of himself walked away in the darkness. It was a deep thought, a grown-up thought, something he might think again twenty years later in his life, if he were to live twenty years more. With that thought—though he might never know it—he was wedded to his girl for all time. The quiet night, the crooked steeple, and the solemn gravestones sanctified his love.

Afraid? His head came up with a snap. What was it she had whispered to him last time about being afraid, truly afraid? It had come out of her as they were parting, a final little gasp of sound in his ear: "Oh, Jimmy, I felt almost like I was followed tonight. Jimmy, what if I was? I'd die if someone were out there now, watching . . ."

And he had only laughed. Who could see them on these moonless nights? Why, the two of them could hardly see each other! Their lips, their hands had to grope blindly in the darkness.

Yet she had been afraid that last time, and not even his love had overcome her fear. One tiny, remote, trembling part of her had escaped him, and now tonight that part of her, that phantom part, that girlish fear, came walking up the hill beside the church and lay down in the green grave grass beside him, and he, too, was afraid.

At first the fear still seemed to be a part of her, something telepathic and distant, as if she were in mortal danger out there on that deep sea of darkness. He had never been near a real sea, but the dark sweep and toss of the tree tops in the soft night wind was like the sea, he knew.

He thought of walking down the hill to meet her, but that would only magnify her terror—if he changed the pattern of their meetings, missed her in the darkness, and she came here to find him gone. That would terrify

her beyond recovery. He sensed that, once it happened, she would never come again.

It never occurred to him that this was a time in their lives to be walking the city streets, bold in their love, to be challenging any law that forbade them to be together. He had not quite grown to the stature of a man yet, though he was growing swiftly tonight, waiting and thinking and feeling the sensation of fear which had grown larger in the girl, night after night.

He stood up, challenging the fear with his strong young shoulders, and felt, oddly, the shadow of himself rising visibly against the night. He felt now that it was possible for him to be seen, a slim dark silhouette against the lesser darkness, against the fuzzy mist of light which rose from the sleepy town.

Who was to see him? He could not control the sharp twist of his long body which faced him toward the cemetery and the leaning gravestones. He could see the stones, one by one, awkward shapeless lumps against the night; but could they see him? Have the dead eyes?

He stood with his legs spread out, felt the boyish speed trembling in them, the speed that could lift him, carry him away with the swiftness of a bird in flight. He wiped the sweat from his throat with a bare hand and then dropped lightly to the turf again, catching himself soundlessly with out-thrust hands and stiffened arms. He crouched for a moment like a sprinter, wondering at his impulse to run away.

Slowly he lowered himself to his haunches, snapped off a tall blade of grass, and gripped it savagely in his teeth.

She sure was a long time in coming. He sat down again and directed his attention the other way, her way, down the hill past the church. Not a sign, no flicker of light down there, no sound.

He had no wristwatch. He could only guess at the hour. She must have chosen a long way to come, a very long way.

His head swung around, twisting awkwardly over his shoulder. She would never come that way. She was too scared; she was a girl. Her imagination could make a cemetery come alive at night.

What was that? The sound in the boy's throat was like a laugh. The trickle of fear along his spine was like the light, racing fingertips of a girl. That drifting, misty movement up there among the stones was only a trick of his slanted eyes. It came from staring too long. He was borrowing on her imagination now. . . . Turn your head away, boy, he said. Don't be a fool.

He turned his head away.

When he looked backward once more he was too late to move, ever again. He merely shrank into the terrible, small core of himself. The flickering shadow in the graveyard had grown into the moving, rushing shape of a man. . . .

2

The University Players closed their season on a Friday night. Last performances were always good, and the show was a hit. At the final curtain applause came up in wave upon wave.

Barney Sewell took the last curtain call alone. He stood very stiffly at centre stage, unsmiling, bowing only once. Then he ducked off the stage and through the door of the set, one step ahead of the stampede for the dressing-rooms.

His little cubicle was separate from the main dressing-room, equipped with a private mirror and washbowl. He was the guest star, the visiting professional.

He slammed the door shut and sat trembling before the mirror. His face—every dark line of it drawn out to a vicious extreme—was a stranger to him. He smeared a big sweating hand from his mouth to his scalp and saw

a white streak like a livid scar across the make-up. He used both hands, desperately, taking huge swabs of Kleenex and stroking violently at the dirty yellow base colour, but the white face when he was done was still a stranger who could not be wiped away.

He bowed his face against his arms. . . .

"Barney!" The rap on the door brought him up with a start.

"Come in, Charlie." His own voice was not recognizable.

Charles Ellis came in smiling. He saw the face that Barney Sewell was seeing in the mirror and hesitated, imperceptibly, before he sat on the edge of the dressing-table. "Clean up, Barney. The kids are throwing a party tonight."

It was Barney Sewell's face in the mirror, after all. Ellis had seen him there. Ellis had smiled.

Barney managed a weak smile of his own. "Do I have to go to the party, Charlie?"

The director slapped his shoulder. "They'd be unhappy without you. They think you're great, you know."

"Great?"

"Best actor I've ever seen in these parts, and that goes for the Broadway stuff we've had." Ellis was an honest, friendly little man. His left eyelid drooped in a perpetual wink. The right brow slanted up at a parallel angle with his unruly grey hair. He noticed the smeared paint on Barney's hands, lit a cigarette, and planted it between Barney's lips. "What a show that was tonight! I wish we could keep you for ever, Barney."

Barney bent forward slowly, as if in pain, pressing a hand over his eyes.

"I'm sorry," Ellis said. "That's one way to tell you that you did not get the job. The instructorship is out."

Ellis lit another cigarette and tried to explain. The board felt they could offer Barney Sewell no more than

an assistantship, which was like living with one arm tied behind you. Full instructors must have college degrees. It said so in the rule-book.

"They did not like my record," Barney said.

"They loved your record, Barney. I told them all about you."

"You do not know all about me."

"I know enough."

Barney raised his head. His eyes were a dark brown, almost black. "The trustees do not usually hire the faculty. I must have been a very special case."

Ellis nodded. "I made you a special case. I went to bat for you, Barney. To no avail, as they say in the classics. I don't suppose you would accept another assistantship?"

Barney shrugged. "The situation would never get any better. I have no degrees, and I am getting too old to try."

"Too old?" Ellis stared. "At thirty-three?"

"Is that what the record says?"

Ellis looked puzzled. "Yes. I think it does. Is the record wrong?"

Barney pressed a hand against his brow. Ellis frowned at the haziness of the actor's manner. He had noticed these hesitations before. So had others, and their notice had not helped Barney's case with the Board of Trustees. "Let it go," Barney said. "I know I am too old to go to school again."

"I go to school every other summer, Barney, and I'm the far side of fifty."

Barney shook his head. "There is not enough time."

"At your age, there is not enough time?" Ellis studied him, long and carefully. "Take time, Barney. Sit down in one place for a while. You move around too much."

"Is that what is wrong with my record?"

"Well, yes and no, Barney. The fact is, you seem to be a drifter. If you will let me be blunt, you are what is known in the trade as a theatrical bum. I am not being

critical, you understand. It's a wonderful thing to have the theatre deep down . . . in your blood."

Ellis was watching the trail of his cigarette smoke toward the ceiling. The long silence brought his eyes down again. Across the actor's face a greasy brown hand had left a fierce five-fingered claw-mark. "My God!" he breathed. "Barney, are you going to get that mess off your face?"

He watched the big man stand up and bend over the washbowl, dipping his hands in the flow from the tap, slowly, broodingly wiping off the clotted brown stain.

"I'll drive you to the party, Barney," Ellis offered. "I ought to look in, but God knows it's a chore. I love these kids—so I tell myself—but I never finish a season without wanting to drop them, one by one, from a very high building."

A great dripping head rose from the washbowl, the face streaked with brown twisted lines. Ellis drew back, startled, as Barney's big hand groped out. A yellowish slime ran down the hairy wrist. Finding a towel, Barney brought it up to his face and wiped away the blinding stain.

When the face finally emerged there was a refreshing resemblance to the man Ellis knew as Barney Sewell.

Ellis sighed and relaxed. He turned to face the wall without actually seeing the rows of photographs which hung there. Here was a very strange man, he thought. You never knew how Barney was going to react. On the stage his violent emotional displays were beautiful to see, instinctively true, but offstage Barney was erratic and unpredictable. It was as if the order of the theatre had been reversed, and the true man was the actor on the stage, while this other man who lived and walked the streets was only a caricature.

Ellis shrugged and resumed his casual manner. Barney had stepped into a dressing-closet. Ellis saw a newspaper crumpled in the wastebasket and picked it up, spreading it on the table. The creases sprang apart, and a small

headline appeared on the uppermost column. Ellis's finger came down sharply to underline the words LOCAL YOUTH DROWNS IN CANAL.

Ellis tugged thoughtfully at one ear lobe. "Barney!"
The dark, shaggy head came out of the closet. "Huh?"
"Did you know this boy?"
"What boy?"

"The one who fell off the bluff into the canal."

Barney's head withdrew. From the closet came only muffled struggling sounds.

Ellis raised his voice. "Pardon my inept choice of words about dropping all the kids on their smart little heads. We lose enough of 'em in the normal course of events. I had forgotten all about this high school boy. Somehow my cynicisms rarely turn out to be funny. I have a psychic aptitude for error. Believe me, psychic!"

Barney made no comment. Thinking it over, Ellis decided his apology was slightly foolish. What possible sympathetic connection could there be between this wandering actor and a local tragedy?

Two minutes later Barney emerged, white-shirted, wriggling into a sports jacket which seemed too small for the breadth of his shoulders. He was pale, but that might be merely the contrast with the yellow make-up. His features were handsome in spite of their moody cast. His heavy black hair resisted the strokes of a brush, stubbornly maintaining its natural shagginess.

"Let's go," he said.

Ellis felt like having a cup of coffee on the way. He did not want to arrive early.

Ellis drove. He chose the Red Top Drugstore, the only night spot that would be open; it served as a sort of permanent clubroom for his actors. Barney Sewell, he knew, spent hours in the place, brooding over his coffee.

Tonight, Sewell was slow in getting out of the car. He walked behind Ellis and stumbled twice over the little professor's heels.

The place was noisy with school chatter, heavy with

smoke. A jukebox sang throatily. They found a vacant booth, and Ellis talked inconsequentially. Finally, he leaned forward with his soft grey brows knit together in a mild frown. "Barney, I wonder if there's any man who does not have to take his second choice in life. I'm a teacher who wanted to be an actor, and you're an actor who wanted to be a teacher. I failed you on the instructorship, but here's a second choice for you, Barney."

Ellis tossed an envelope on the table. He leaned forward, flushed with enthusiasm, and his fingernail traced under the top line of the printed return address:

Northwest Drama Festival

He looked up to find Barney not listening to him, not even seeing him. The actor's eyes were slanting past Ellis's shoulder, focused oddly, distantly.

Ellis turned. He saw a lone blond girl at the farthest table, facing him. She was not physically alone. Three friends leaned about her, but she was not a part of their conversation. Her eyes were fixed on nothing, her lips pinched in a thin white line. She was a lovely girl, but her colourless face was the frozen image of misery.

Ellis was sure that Barney and the girl were not actually looking at each other, but there was a startling similarity in their eyes. They were looking into opposite depths of concentration, like two strangers meeting in space.

When Ellis thought that Barney did not see the girl, when he decided that they could not be sharing the same vision, he was wrong. Perhaps it was Ellis's psychic gift for error, as he called it. He could not know that Barney Sewell and this girl, a room's length apart, fifteen or more years apart, were both thinking of a boy who lay face down in a muddy pool of water. Barney Sewell did know the girl in a way. He had known her for weeks, though he had never spoken to her in his life.

Barney's eyes came slowly back out of distance, back from the dark waters and the long limp body of the boy,

back to the living face of the girl. If Charles Ellis could have seen the image of her in Barney's mind he would have been more frightened than he had ever been in his life.

Barney Sewell moved suddenly, blindly, half rising from his seat. Ellis's voice, the kindly tone, arrested him: "Barney, aren't you going to read this letter? It's for you, not for me!"

Barney sat down. His big fingers fumbled with the seal of the envelope, rattled the letter in opening it. He blinked several times, wiped a moist hand along his brow, and read:

DEAR MR. ELLIS,

We are pleased to inform you that we have accepted Mr. Barney Sewell, upon your recommendation, for one of our cash scholarships. We feel that his maturity and experience will be a distinct asset to the Festival this summer.

He may apply at the Festival Office any time before June 16th. He will be expected, of course, to participate to the full extent of his abilities in any acting or other theatre assignments which may be given him.

Find brochure enclosed, describing the Shakespearian plays in this season's repertoire. Thanks again for your long-time interest in our work. When are you coming out to see the shows?

Sincerely,

MITCHELL FALLON
Director, Northwest Drama Festival

Barney Sewell's eyes were clearing. He was himself again, the professional actor. The change was a minor miracle. "Shakespeare. Shakespeare every night of the week. This would be a rare opportunity, Charlie!"

"Would be, man, it is!" Ellis leaned over and patted the big man's shoulder. "Living Shakespeare, the way it was written. Elizabethan staging. Five separate areas. Full speed without a single stop. I wish I could get out to see you this summer, Barney."

Barney Sewell stroked the muscular curve of his jaw

Theatre talk always normalized him. "I am not sure their idea of Shakespeare would fit with mine."

"*King Lear* will be the tragedy. You've made a study of *Lear*, haven't you? I had that in mind when I applied for your scholarship."

"*Lear* was part of my first attempt at a thesis, years ago."

"What went wrong?"

Barney frowned. "I had never gone through college. I was trying to jump fences. It did not work. They will not let you in, except by the front gate."

Ellis smiled, fondly. It was the frankest statement he had ever heard Barney make, and it pleased him. "Oh, to hell with 'em," he said, sympathetically. "There's nothing as stupid as scholasticism."

Barney Sewell shook his head, not agreeing. "Lear," he said in an undertone, speaking to himself. "Lear."

"You might get to play the title role, Barney."

"I was not thinking—" Sewell's eyes shifted back to his friend's face, and he broke off with one of his puzzling evasive expressions.

"Not thinking of Lear?" .

Sewell failed to answer.

"Well, the whole play is full of character, Barney, too full for most theatres—Gloucester, Kent, Edmund, Cornwall—"

Sewell was no longer listening. He was a finely tuned intellectual instrument, and it was difficult to stay with his abrupt shadings of mind, the light and the dark. If Ellis had watched his hands, he might have seen the conflict, the indecision, evident in the way Sewell clasped and unclasped his sweating fingers, but Ellis was studiously fitting Barney Sewell with King Lear's white hair and grey beard.

Barney's hands edged uncertainly forward until they lay within reach of the little black and white Festival folder. The muscles relaxed, and the hands opened. Leaning forward, his mouth open, half smiling with the

sudden release from all restraint, Barney picked up the folder and turned back the cover to read.

As he read, the girl with the pale face and the boy with no face at all backed slowly away from him, receding into some convenient compartment of his mind marked "Forgotten . . ."

Wn. 12' 60 N.P.

PART TWO

The Northwest Drama Festival has no stars. Student actors from all parts of the country share roles and stage jobs with experienced professionals. You may carry a spear one night and perform the leading role the next, wear motley in one play, armour in another. You may hold the script, or pound nails. Every actor is important, and no job is a minor one . . .

I

LOREN CLIFT—LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA—PLACED HIS slippers foot flat against the wall, a full six inches above his head. The silk tights bulged with the slim muscles of his leg. He stroked a hand warmly up the flesh, ostensibly smoothing a wrinkle in the silk, but he felt real pleasure in the firm curve of his own thigh. Right there before his eyes was one of the two most beautiful legs in Hollywood. He was standing on the other one.

He glanced down the line at the other ballet students, undismayed by the fact that others of them might be thinking the same thing—not about him but about themselves. The difference was that he was right and they were wrong. Out of all that thinly-clad flesh in the big airy studio gym, if he were given a choice of two legs to take home with him, male or female, he would pick this pair right here.

Unfortunately, the talent scouts could not see beyond anything that was undressed and female. Or maybe their nearsightedness was fortunate after all. He, Loren Clift,

did not really belong to Hollywood, aside from his beautiful body and his beautiful face. He loved theatre, and this was not theatre. This was boredom under a white-hot light, an audience that drifted unresponsively in space. Press agents looked at the price tag before they looked at the man, and Clift, the dancer, was still on the shelf labelled "unclassified merchandise."

It might be worth his time to look into that summer theatre up north. His dancing coach had advised it. Shakespeare was written to be danced. He had known that the first time he ever read the stuff. Only the people of the ballet knew that a poet was really a dancer who could not get his feet off the ground. . . .

2

Anthony Riordan—London, England—was impressed with the U.S., but not awed by it. It was big. In fact, if the people over here were as big as the spaces between them America might very well carry the hope of the world.

Riordan was at ease and at home wherever he travelled. In World War II he had fought with an international outfit, and he was a master of dialect. If he had been a criminal running from the law he could have melted into the U.S. background like a native. His crisp British speech was only a trademark: an Englishman was expected to be English.

His trench-coat, grey hat and ugly brown pipe were not conspicuously out of place in the busy little mountain terminal where he had to transfer from train to bus. The town was wedged into a deep, narrow canyon, reminding him of some of the mining villages he had known in his youth. Nothing was level. Streets were terraced one above another as high as he could see into the mountain mist. He deposited his heavy luggage at the busy station and

climbed a steeply curving sidewalk to the nearest restaurant.

Choosing a stool that faced the shiny urns, Riordan was halfway through the meal before he discovered his own face in the wall mirror. He pushed up his hat, loosened his collar, and scowled at what he saw. Front or side view, he was certainly no matinee idol. He hoped that these rural Shakespearians were not expecting a John Gielgud or a Michael Wilding. His gaunt face might fit the American conception of Scotland Yard, especially with a pipe clenched in the teeth. His nose was a passable facsimile of Stewart Granger's, but Granger was not wearing it. Perhaps he could pass himself off as T. S. Eliot seen through a cocktail glass.

He smiled, amused at the thought, and closed one steely eye with a cynical wink. It was not until he had lifted the teacup to his lips that he discovered another face in the mirror at an acute angle to his left. A hot swallow of tea was trapped on his tongue, refusing to go up or down. Compounding the pain with the shock of discovering that he had just winked at a beautiful girl, he was in momentary danger of choking to death. Somehow the tea burned its way down through his chest, and he sat there gasping, a performance which sent the red flush higher into the girl's pale cheeks. Long gold-blond lashes covered the confusion in her eyes, giving him a chance for a complete, swift inspection. Her lips were straight and slender but not prim. The golden-yellow hair spun down to her shoulders in long natural waves. It was a classic face, and he was a student of the classics.

Bending forward, he speared one of his brook trout, a left-handed motion that made him acutely self-conscious because the girl saw him do it and frowned slightly, unable to identify his European use of the fork as anything but bad manners.

He deliberately avoided looking at her for the rest of the meal and further chastised himself by walking up to the cashier, paying his cheque, and stepping outside

without a backward glance. There was a temptation to peep in through the Venetian blinds, but with his luck she might step out the door just in time to catch him in the act.

It was now fully dark. He walked sternly down the hill to the station, boarded his bus, and grimly made his way rearward. He pulled his hat down over his eyes and was dozing fitfully when the big bus roared up the mountain grade, climbing out of the town on what seemed to approximate a spiral staircase.

The girl in the mirror was a mistake, a myth; she had to be. Only three months were left now on his travelling scholarship before he must go home to Britain. Romantic alliances between nations were dangerous in these troublous times. His heart belonged to an island and a continent. . . . But the girl was still on his mind when his head slumped against his shoulder in a deep sleep, broken by uneasy dreams.

A contradictory voice intervened in his reverie, but its argument seemed to consist of only one monotonous phrase: "Cascade City, your station . . . Cascade City, your station . . ."

He blinked at the driver.

"You get off here, mister. Cascade City."

"Eh? . . . Thank you." He scrambled about for his luggage with numb hands, wriggled into his hat and coat, staggered drunkenly along the aisle, and floundered down the steps.

The bus roared away, left him standing there on a dark and lonely city street. He glanced at his watch. Midnight. He sighed. That was undoubtedly the fastest three-hour trip he had ever taken. Pleasant, too, in an ethereal way. He remembered the girl again. Good-bye, he thought, sentimentally. Good-bye, my dear, and thank you for a pleasant evening. . . .

Across the street he noticed a large neon sign, HOTEL. The heavy leather bags dragged from the ends of his arms, and his feet felt like clubs.

He would be lucky to find a vacancy. He might have to phone Fallon, the director, for an overnight bed. Just now he felt like curling up in a doorway.

He backed into the hotel through the swinging doors and dumped both armloads on the nearest divan.

He heard a voice and stood up very straight. It was a low voice, shy, with a musical sound that he seemed to have heard before:

"The bus driver said this was my hotel. Do you have a reservation for Miss Ethel Tucker of San Francisco?"

It could not be! How had she eluded his notice this way? Turning slowly he knew who would be standing there at the desk. His eyes met hers fully, steadily. He smiled. This time she responded with a friendly inquiring smile.

3

Ethel Tucker—San Francisco, California—lay wide-awake in the cool stream of mountain air from the open window, hands behind her head.

She was going to be all right. Six months ago she would not have believed that she could look ahead to anything. At twenty it was dangerous to turn backward—the experts took delight in advising her—but Billy Lewiston's death had seemed to draw a line beyond which there was no penetrating, no growing old. She must always be twenty because that's what Billy would be; time had cut him off in a flaming burst of jet power over the China Sea. . . .

That was half a year ago, and she had already outgrown the first stages of loneliness. She would never forget Billy, but she knew now that memory was part of a living process. No part of a life could be captured and held forever in a glass cell exactly as it was. The eyes of a mature woman could not go on seeing Billy as she saw him now.

She turned on her side, breathing deeply of the pine smell, knowing she would sleep well.

The change had come too gradually to be noticed. At first the Shakespearian scholarship had seemed like an escape—she would not have to be herself for a whole summer—but to-night there had been a kind of excitement in being herself, in being recognized by a perfect stranger, as if, somehow, through a mysterious process of time and movement, he had been looking for her, and then seeing her had drawn back in surprise.

Well, it was interesting stuff for dreaming. No nightmares tonight. She went to sleep quietly, pleased to find that she had grown six months older.

4

Paul Enright—Venice, California—was not enjoying the long bus ride north from Los Angeles. By twilight of the first day he was restless and sullen. His moodiness was spoiling the trip for Glory, too. He knew that, but could do nothing about it. What a way to spend a honeymoon—quarrelling! Was this to be an omen for the whole of his married life?

The letter in his left-hand pocket weighed mysteriously upon him, an intolerable burden.

Silently, he argued with the sleeping red head that pressed gently against his right shoulder. It was not a question of the kind of person his mother-in-law might be. It was a mother's privilege to fly out from Pennsylvania and join her daughter in midsummer at Cascade City. She was merely combining a vacation with an instinctive protectiveness. The part that annoyed him was this pretence they must carry on in the mother's presence, this absurd and unnatural half-marriage. Left alone they could have spent the summer together, revealing their marriage discreetly to friends. Now, all that was changed.

With one year to go on his university degree, and only enough funds to support himself, he had agreed with Glory's decision to keep the wedding a secret from her parents. It meant their marriage had to be a living falsehood, and only now was he beginning to understand the possible ramifications of living falsely. Fundamentally, it involved a misappropriation of her parents' money, since they were blissfully unaware that Glory's allowance went to the support of a secret marriage.

Glory was oddly naïve about the whole thing. He could not look her squarely in the face and tell her she was taking money under false pretences. Face to face he was helpless. Glory, Glory—she must have had that quality of wonder at her very birth to be so aptly named. Who could question her innocence? If there was error here, it was his own.

This was the year he hoped to find himself as an actor. Mitch Fallon expected a lot of him, but how could he play the roles of other men with—what did they call it? —artistic integrity when he was not doing an honest job of playing himself?

Troubled, he threw his arms around his wife, and without waking she lifted her lips warmly against his own.

5

Daniel Whitaker—Chicago, Illinois—Shakespearian authority, drama and literary critic for the *Evening Register*, was met at the airport by Mitchell Fallon.

The field seemed ridiculously small and rural and ill-kept for a busy air terminal. On the sloping grassy hillside above it, a herd of beef grazed lazily. The big plane dropped smoothly and sleekly out of another world.

Whitaker came down the steps, long-legged, loose-kneed, feeling as dishevelled as if he had flown the distance without benefit of fuselage.

"Dan, it's good to see you."

"Hello, Mitch."

"Nice trip?"

"Moderately nauseating. I have despised all mediums of travel since I developed a violent case of motion sickness in the saddle of my rocking-horse."

"Well, come along," Fallon said. "I know a sure cure for you. Here, let me have those bags."

"The last time you cured me, Mitch, I would rather have died."

"Pomeroy has been working on this cure all afternoon."

"How is Pomeroy? Will he do Lear for you?"

"Will he? All the king's horses could not restrain him!"

"Good man! Do we have to ride in that thing, Mitch? I would rather walk."

"Walk? For five miles? Don't be athletic, Whitaker. And please speak in whispers when insulting my car. Isabel is a creature of moods."

While his host tossed bags carelessly upon the rotting rear cushions of an ancient blue sedan, Dan Whitaker let himself down gingerly on the front seat. "Steady, Isabel."

"That's right, Dan. You have to talk to her."

Dan Whitaker felt his long body relaxing. There was comfort in the thought that two feet of space, not twenty thousand, separated him from the good earth. "I believe Isabel likes me," he said.

Mitchell Fallon slid under the wheel and fondly patted the dashboard. He was a slender man of medium height. Sandy grey hair grew thinly back from a high brow. His nose was long and straight-bridged, the eyes mildly shrewd. The familiar little quirk of a smile was tucked like an invisible pipe into one corner of his mouth. Dan Whitaker studied the lean sensitive face with a surging renewal of affection.

"So Pomeroy will do Lear for you?" he said.

"Yes, he more or less agreed to—at the point of a gun."

"I'll bet Pomeroy was holding the gun."

Fallon laughed heartily. The old sedan suddenly shot out of the airport parking lot, defiantly outraging the big airliner, which was already turning for its take-off. "Can you think of anyone else?"

"Frankly, no. Pomeroy is your man. He has Lear's size, and he has the power, and he also has the heart when he gets around to using it."

Fallon chuckled. "I just hope we can find the power to support him. I will not have a one-man show. That fallacy has almost ruined *Lear* for the stage." He took his thin hands from the steering-wheel and rubbed them together ecstatically. "The play is a dream, Dan. It's a tremendous nightmare of a dream. There is no end of character in it."

Whitaker sat up uneasily while the car lurched down the slope from the airport. He breathed again when Fallon's hands returned to the wheel. "You and Isabel seem to have a marvellous rapport."

"Haven't we, though? I am thinking of casting Isabel as one of Lear's daughters."

"As Cordelia, I suppose. I can picture the death scene, with Lear cradling a Hudson in his arms! If you want power, that would be power!"

"Ah, Cordelia! Daniel, just wait until you see Cordelia!" Fallon shut his eyes blissfully and Whitaker clenched his teeth, watching the narrow pavement rush menacingly at the hood of the car.

"Damn you, Mitch, your driving combines all of the dangers of air travel with none of the comforts."

The eyes came open. "Sorry. I was thinking of my Cordelia. She arrived last night by bus. Phoned me this morning. That voice, that girl!"

"A voice will help, but how does she look? No more ecstasies, please—just the plain facts."

"She is a blonde, Daniel. All gold and honey. Her eyes

are the most beautifully expressive things you have ever seen. Yet with all her loveliness she has that final quality which a good Cordelia must have."

"What final quality? I thought beauty was enough?"

"The quality of death."

Whitaker's jaw dropped. "The what?"

"You heard me. Cordelia's death can be the most beautiful thing in all literature. This girl has it, Dan. She has the quality."

"Hmm. I hope you have not told her so."

"I have told her nothing. I saw her once, and I was stricken dumb."

"Really? Have you informed your wife?"

"Oh, Martha does not mind. She knows I fall in love with characters, not with women."

Whitaker dropped a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"All women are characters."

"Well, well, Daniel. That sounds suspiciously cynical. Are you having trouble at home?"

"I was not speaking bitterly. Home is great. I wish I had brought mine with me."

Fallon's sharp mind shot off at one of its sardonic tangents. "We are getting quite an assortment of characters this summer, by the way, and not all of them are women."

"Anything special?"

"Well, there's an English boy who has played at Stratford. He arrived last night, too. I like him. Mature in his manner. I can see him as a possible Kent. I need maturity. Youth, of course, is bubbling all over the place."

"Could this Englishman play Edmund?"

Fallon's eyes came around briefly, frowning. "The bastard? I don't know. Why did you ask?"

Whitaker smiled. "No mystery about it. Edmund happens to be my favourite character in that show."

"You were not thinking of trying out for the role, Dan?"

Whitaker laughed. "I? Edmund? With these gangling legs of mine? Let us not be ridiculous, my friend."

Fallon sighed in relief. "You never know. So many people would like to play so many roles, and the legs do not make the man, though they do help to fill out a pair of tights. Casting for *Lear* is going to be a nightmare."

"Especially Edmund."

Fallon's eyes turned again, ignoring the road, thoughtful and questioning. "You feel that about Edmund, too, Daniel?"

"Feel what?"

"He is really the deepest mystery of all Shakespeare's creations. He has the blackest, deepest heart of them all, Daniel. Where can we find an actor who will understand Edmund?"

The grey eyes came back to the weaving, sinuous thread of pavement, and they rode the rest of the miles in silence.

PART THREE

I

SPRING CASCADED DOWN THE MOUNTAIN IN A WILD green abundance, veined with sparkling streams. To the west the mountains rose to successively greater heights, one peak climbing on the shoulders of another, pyramid-ing to a gaunt, frosty monarch of rock and snow, which dominated the whole valley. Two angular ridges formed great wings of shadow against the western sun, forecast-ing the cool of evening long before the day was gone.

A young torrent, clean and cold from the melting snows, poured out of a deep gash between the ridges and formed a mile-long glade of magnificent spruce and fir and cedar, a natural park which had permanently been set aside for visitors to Cascade City. Rustic paths and unexpected footbridges, green fern and brilliant flowers, brought the wilderness right into the heart of the city.

At the bottom of the park, the rushing mountain stream vanished suddenly into a dark cement aqueduct threading its way by a mysterious procession of tunnels under the busiest streets, a living, pulsing artery far beneath the visible surface, to emerge again below the town and join the larger tributary which gave this valley its name.

Near the gaping cavity of cement which swallowed up the swift waters, a grassy knoll sloped up gently to com-mand a view of both the park and the city, and on this knoll stood a strange circular enclosure flying the flags of a lost medieval history. A solid oval wall of cement rose like a fortress to a height of ten feet. At one end a narrow roof of planks and tarpaper towered high above the stone walls. Seen from the outside, this strange freak

of architecture resembled an ancient castle whose roof had collapsed under the weight of years, except for the one ribbed fragment standing stubbornly alone; but, within, this monstrosity of time housed a life that was all its own. . . .

It was early afternoon, and the roofless pavilion was briefly and totally empty. The hot sun beat down on a sloping amphitheatre of green turf and cement terraces. The two-story frame structure at one end of the pit was simply the housing for a large open-air stage with a wide flaring apron and yawning areaways. Two wing balconies and a long railed gallery overhung the pillared fore stage. Out in the audience area, in the shadow of this great relic of a stage, stood a single gaudy beach umbrella, its awning tilted at a rakish angle. It was a crude joke, a mockery out of its rightful niche in time.

The actual time was 2.00 p.m. of a mid-twentieth-century day in June. Majestically, a pair of solid gates set in the concrete wall swung heavily inward, and life poured down the green slope, a life that was as gay and inappropriate as the ridiculous beach umbrella. Blue jeans, T-shirts, sarongs, and shorts clashed alarmingly with the subtle creak of armour from the gloomy battlements of the stage.

Out of the strange procession darted a bare-chested, ape-shouldered individual in skin-tight trunks who raced down the slope with a howl, cleared the railed apron in one leap, and vanished through an archway to reappear immediately brandishing a huge broadsword, with which he proceeded to slash and thrust about him in a frenzy of theatrics, littering the stage with invisible opponents.

"Give 'em hell, Ollie!" someone shouted, and the summer season of the Northwest Drama Festival was officially launched.

The three directors of the Festival huddled over a shaky card table in the scant shade of the beach umbrella. Daniel Whitaker and Mitchell Fallon were physically

dominated by a bronze giant who sat between them, leaning back in his chair, filling his great chest deeply with this fresh summer theatre air. There was no other atmosphere like it in the world. John Pomeroy could smell it, and the smell was good. He tapped a blunt finger on the table and nodded his head to a silent, ghostly music that welled out of the dark and vacant stage, the music of old, lost summers. He was not really an old man, was younger than either Fallon or Whitaker, but he felt like a patriarch surrounded by his family, like the tallest of the mountains over there, the hoary ancient one, the giant, the king, King Lear. He felt at home.

"Ready, John?"

Pomeroy's head nodded without once breaking the rhythm of his reverie. His deep-blue eyes watched in mild amusement as Mitchell Fallon trotted down the slope toward the stage. Fallon's shapeless trousers and limp, colourless sports shirt successfully hid a natural spryness, a professional grace, which could change him in one swift moment from age to youth, from grotesque humour to profound tragedy. He was sly, nimble, doddering, stupid, brilliant, passionate, feared, and fearful; he was an artist who could sketch the characters of his play with every delicate sensitive line of his body. Not that he wished, like *Midsummer Night's Bottom*, to play all the roles himself, but it had often been remarked that Fallon, drawing performances from lesser talents than his own, was more of a show than the show itself.

A short slender man, Fallon grew tall against the intangible, shadowy dimensions of the stage, dominating the open amphitheatre, and the little knots of actors became suddenly quiet and expectant. The director's voice came back to him from the vacant spaces in a thousand little echoes, and there was a sigh in it which none could hear but himself, a sigh of welcome to the young and the eager and the ambitious and even to the sophisticated, the cynical and bored ones. Scattered groups of them filled the cold, bare cement steppes and

the green slopes with colour and excitement and beauty, and though he could not tell them so he could tell himself, with that echoing tiny quaver in his throat, that here was his whole life spread before him, a thousand faces, a thousand voices, a thousand hearts that he had touched and shaped and illumined, year by year. The words they spoke were another's, Shakespeare's, but the thousand voices were his own. . . .

" . . . does not mean that any role in any play is cast in advance. We do admit one thing—that a try-out cannot tell us everything about you. Some, who have been with us before, have already demonstrated what they can do and what they will do to make themselves a part of the show. Admittedly, they have an advantage, but there are over one hundred roles in these four plays, and you have a right to any one of them. There is only one final criterion of good casting: we want the audiences who come here, some for thousands of miles, to go away saying they have seen Shakespeare and Shakespeare is the greatest show on earth! With no apologies to Barnum and Bailey! Now, let's go, and God be with you. . . ."

To an outsider the prolonged spectacle which followed must have seemed mildly lunatic. A single name, a character, would be called, and a dozen men might spring to their feet, sauntering, ambling, trotting, or sneaking down to the stage, where they entered, one by one, sheepishly, awkwardly, boldly, violently, gracefully, or stupidly, delivering exactly the same lines in hoarse, shy, shrill, deep, thundering, stammering, quavering voices. A few were clever, some were gifted, and one or two might even be brilliant, but of all it could be surely said—there were no two of them alike.

Gradually, through the heat of afternoon and into the long shadows of twilight, an unspoken, indefinable process of elimination narrowed the ranks. A minor role suddenly came alive in the imagination of some actor, a rippling whisper ran along the grass, and a pencil was struck through a name. At 5.00 p.m. there was a two-hour

break for dinner. To escape the crowd, the three directors found themselves a gloomy rear booth in the most expensive restaurant in town. Whitaker and Pomeroy showed less of the strain than Mitchell Fallon. Whitaker was directing the two comedies, and comedy came easily to these youngsters. He was already visualizing his dress rehearsals. John Pomeroy's greatest problem in doing the season's history play was solved; he had found himself a Falstaff, a football player from the University of Washington.

"My mind is relieved," Pomeroy said. "I had certain uneasy visions of being forced to play the role myself."

"John, you know you'd love to play it."

Pomeroy glanced sharply at Whitaker, hesitated over a reproof, then smiled. "Some other time, please. King Lear and Sir John would be an impossible combination. I shouldn't mind if the audience saw a little of Lear in my Falstaff, but any signs of Falstaff in my Lear would ruin the best show of the season." He clapped Fallon's shoulder in an impulsively friendly gesture. "You have your work cut out with that play, Mitch. How is it going?"

Fallon's hands were nervous, lighting a cigarette. Casting was one of the great terrors of his life. He had seen the disasters that can come from a single major error in judgment. Women's roles did not bother him. There were always too many women actors. The problem was to keep the girls happily busy when they did not get a speaking part. The real casting problem was a male one. Fallon glanced at his maze of notes, stroked hastily with his pencil, then took a fresh sheet and wrote two lists in parallel. The battle seemed to narrow down, he said, to these:

Kent	Sewell
Fool	Van Horn
Edgar	Clift
Edmund	Riordan
Oswald	Enright

Dan Whitaker, on Fallon's left in the curving booth, leaned toward his friend's shoulder, stretching his long neck to do so, supporting his jaw with a forked hand and a sharply braced elbow—a contorted, lopsided reading position which would have seemed awkward in some but in him was somehow appropriate to his lean angularity of body. Whitaker had never stood or sat fully erect in his life. The slouch was a quality of his character.

Whitaker read the two lists and shut his eyes, trying to place the five actors in his mind. Riordan was the young Irish-Englishman with the mild ways and the nicely varied delivery. Riordan had a gift for reading no two roles alike, nor any role badly. He was assured of some major assignments in the other plays. In *Lear* it was only a matter of casting him in the best possible place.

"I thought you were considering Riordan for the Earl of Kent," Whitaker said.

"I was—but this other man, this Barney Sewell, reads Kent better. He did the best job on the stock scene that I have ever heard. You would have thought he had been practising all winter."

"Maybe he has."

"Hardly. We received his application for the scholarship only a week before the deadline."

"He may have played the role before," John Pomeroy said.

"No. His record does not say so. He has not played Kent, but he has played King Lear."

"*Lear?*" Pomeroy's blue eyes met steadily with Mitchell Fallon's more elusive grey ones. "Why haven't you tried him out for *Lear* then, Mitch?"

"He didn't sign up for it."

"Makes no difference. Try him out. I have no option on the role. I might decide to do Falstaff, after all, though it would seriously complicate my job of directing."

"I don't want to try this Barney Sewell for *Lear*," Fallon said. "I'm afraid of him."

"Afraid?"

Whitaker and Pomeroy sat up, attentively.

Fallon smiled, nervously. "Sewell is something of a puzzle. I had a private talk with him this morning, and his record reads like a Shakespearian anthology, right down the line—title roles, I mean: Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Antony, Cæsar, both Richards, and one of the Henrys. Have I overlooked anything?"

All three men burst into spontaneous, violent laughter. It was Whitaker who finally controlled himself enough to comment: "It would take an incredible imagination even to make such a claim, let alone to play all those roles. I can see why you are afraid of him. Why don't we forget all about Mr. Sewell?"

Fallon scowled. "It does sound that way, Dan, but you just happen to be mistaken. This lad, I honestly believe, is authentic. He has played all those roles—not in professional shows, of course, but in summer stock and university guest spots."

"How do you know?"

"Ever hear of Charles DeWitt Ellis?"

"Ellis?" Whitaker nodded with enthusiasm. "Know him personally. We are neighbours of a sort. He lives two states east of me, but I know him!"

"I regard Charles DeWitt Ellis as—ahem—the Number Two director of amateur theatre in this country."

Whitaker grinned. "Shucks, man, you know all three of us here can't be Number One!"

Fallon smiled abstractedly. "Charles Ellis has recommended this man Sewell highly. Swears he is the most versatile and brilliant actor in the amateur theatre."

"Why haven't we heard of him out here?"

"Well, Sewell is a non-commercial type. Artistic. Shuns publicity. Ellis said we might find him difficult, but we certainly should find him useful."

"You think he might become difficult?" Whitaker said shrewdly.

"Not because of Charles Ellis's warning, no." Fallon palmed his eyes, wearily. "This afternoon I suspected

Sewell of being erratic. The way he read Kent was the best thing I saw out there, but on some of the other stuff he was almost unintelligible."

"I noticed that," John Pomeroy remarked. "There were times when I felt like asking Ollie Van Horn to stab Sewell in the pants with a rapier."

Dan Whitaker's fingers drummed the table. All signs of amusement were gone from his face. "You gentlemen are observing but not quite observing enough. There were not *times* when Sewell was erratic. There was only one time."

Mitchell Fallon's head came up from the cup of his hands, protestingly. "Why, I distinctly remember—"

Whitaker waved him down. "Only one time," he repeated. "Only one characterization, that is. Sewell fell apart whenever he tried to read the lines of Edmund."

Fallon looked at his friend long and carefully. His voice revealed a hoarse, rising note of excitement. "You know—you may be right, Dan. Edmund. Sewell faltered when he was reading Edmund. That may be why I could not think of him in the role." A sudden fierce light streaked across Fallon's expressive face. "Why, he has all the natural characteristics. Edmund! Of course! He is big—did you see the muscles in those forearms? He is dark and virile. He is exotic; the Moor of Venice would be his best Shakespearian role, and what is Edmund but a kind of guilty Othello, a true son of evil?"

"I could argue your comparison of Edmund and Othello," Whitaker said. "Edmund is a kind of guilty Edmund, that's all. There is no character like him in Shakespeare."

Fallon lifted his hands appealingly to the heavens. "Sewell is Edmund! How could I have missed that?"

"Who cares what he is," said John Pomeroy calmly, "if he cannot be heard beyond the second row?"

"But he can be heard!" Fallon's eyes were almost feverish with excitement. "When he read Kent, I felt the ground shaking under me. That was the way he hit me."

"That was Kent!" Pomeroy snapped, with unexpected irritation. Colour darkened the brown of his throat. "A real actor plays every part to the limit. I wish you would let him read Lear, not Edmund, Mitch. I would like to match him, line for line. Do it, Mitch. Try him on Lear. I don't want you to give me the title role. *I want to take it away from him!*"

2

Mitchell Fallon studied his own two hands shielding a tremendous match flame against the summer wind. These two wry hands were in control of a monster, he thought . . . a monster. . . . With a wry twist of his fingers he threw away the match and drew deeply on his cigarette, working the hot sharp smoke in his mouth, letting it rise slowly from the corners of his lips, a veil through which he saw his actors distantly. He was uneasy, unsure of himself, too soon, much too soon. Every summer he had felt the invisible, breathing presence of the monster, but never like this, at the beginning of the season, prepared to haunt him night and day for six long weeks. There were many names for it. Personality was one. Temperament was another. These actors were good, all of them, better than they had ever been any summer he could remember, and that would help his casting, but it would also mean deeper jealousies, deeper conflicts, darker reckonings.

In all his career as a director, Fallon asked himself, would he ever have hesitated for an instant at awarding the role of the Earl of Kent to that big dark man on the stage playing with such intense, righteous fury, such perfect timing, such boldness? Here was a Kent who would truly dominate the stage, as he was meant to dominate the enemies of King Lear.

Fallon waved his hand, and two actors moved back

into position. Fallon's eyes narrowed, darting back and forth. A slim graceful young man was dancing before the anger of Kent in the manner of the cowardly, effeminate servant, Oswald. The scene was a miniature masterpiece, one of those rarities in the theatre, a perfect performance at the first try-out. These two actors could never get better than they were at this moment; they could only go backward.

Fallon leaped to his feet. "Cut!" he shouted. "Cut! That's all."

Oswald's cringing cowardice miraculously melted away. He pirouetted twice on one toe, and leaped to the narrow rail of the stage, posing there without a quiver, a statuesque marvel of perfect balance. Some crude humorist in the audience let out a long, low whistle, but the dancer lost control of not a single muscle. He faced the director, a thin, contemptuous smile on his lips, waiting.

Mitchell Fallon snapped his cigarette down on the cement and trotted down into the pit. He stood there for a tense moment facing the big man who leaned against a pillar on the fore stage still turning the pages of his script, a dark frown slanting across his eyes. Fallon licked his lips. He started to say, "That's Kent, Mr. Sewell, that's exactly what I want."

The words did not come. Fallon just stood there, exhausted by his own nervous indecision. His voice was weak and ineffective: "That's all for you now, Mr. Sewell."

The black lashes rose. The eyes came away from their contemplation with a heavy, almost drowsy effort. Sewell's dynamic energy was gone. He was like a man stricken by a slow-working drug.

"What?"

"I said that is all, Mr. Sewell."

"All?"

Fallon smiled. "For now."

The big man seemed to wake with a start, becoming conscious of the ring of eyes, the hot intent eyes of his

competitors. He took one step toward the apron, then drew back with a quick, almost unnoticeable gesture of his hand across his brow. The pit might have been a tremendous gulf separating him from the others, and some strange vertigo kept him from approaching the edge of it. "Oh, yes, thank you," he said vaguely in the deepest part of his throat. He turned and walked back under the main balcony, his chest thrown out with a natural stalwartness that combined power and grace and something else, like the stealth of an animal. Mitchell Fallon watched him vanishing in the gloom of the inner below.

Fallon climbed to the stage and peered carefully outward from the blinding cell of white light. "If we seem to be working in circles here, please forgive us—"

He cut the apology short, and a long finger suddenly stabbed out into the night. "Paul! Paul Enright!"

A blond young man scrambled awkwardly to his feet, hesitated, looking down at the pretty red head beside him. He threw away a cigarette and ran down an aisle.

Fallon planted one foot on the railing and leaned toward Enright with a half doubtful frown. "Mmm, will you read Kent for me, Paul?"

Enright's mouth was open, crookedly, his breathing uneven. "Kent?"

"Yes, the same scene again."

Enright swallowed deeply and drew a book from his hip pocket, riffling the pages nervously.

"Van Horn!"

"Yep!" Another young man sprang out of a circle of laughing young women.

"Will you read Oswald for us, Ollie?"

Ollie Van Horn was considerably more bold than Enright in accepting the challenge. He still wore his tight trunks of the afternoon, revealing his hairy, muscular, unaesthetic legs, but he had condescended to don his own variety of evening dress, a brilliant rainbow-

hued T-shirt. His chief stock as an actor was a sturdy, capable body and a loosely muscled face which adapted itself readily from clownish exaggeration to dramatic action. He was neither handsome nor ugly, and it was generally agreed that no one ever knew what he would do next.

The scene which followed was slow in getting under way, but Shakespeare's words contained so much heroic violence opposed to cowardly buffoonery that they spoke for themselves. At the end of the scene Paul Enright's sword arm hung in tense, trembling anger over the whimpering servant, Van Horn. Enright's concentration was not upon the blow; he was wondering if he could ever be more than a poor imitation of the Kent who had stood here a few moments before. There had been one brief, transfixing moment when he had felt himself growing tall before Van Horn, growing to his full manly height and higher, but now he knew only exhaustion and futility, and he wanted to run and bury his face in the arms of his wife—his wife and his refuge. . . .

"That will do, gentlemen, thank you," Mitch Fallon said.

Van Horn took off like a deer over the stage rail and bounded up the terraced slope to dive headlong into a shrieking scramble of slacks and sweaters. Rolling over twice in the deep grass, he staggered to his feet again, lugging a girl under each arm, and ran all the way with them through the outer gate to a shrill accompaniment of whistles, howls, and bits of earthy advice.

Paul Enright, during this diversion, slipped quietly down from the stage. A few feet from the director's bench he hesitated. Instead of joining his wife he struck off rather stiffly toward the gate.

He did not follow Van Horn, who had managed to drag his squirming prizes halfway down the grassy slope to the park before they broke, screaming, away from him. Enright moved along the outer wall of the amphitheatre to the side entrance of the stage and ducked

under a dim hanging lantern into the cool emptiness of the dark wings. This early in the season the inner structure of the stage was nothing more than a windy, dusty shell, a suit of armour without an occupant.

Enright groped to a dark stairway which angled up to the balcony and the dressing-rooms. He sat on the lower stair, lit a cigarette, and pressed his face into the soft cushion of his hands.

Another scene began on stage, but he heard it indifferently, involved in his own bitterness, until a hand came unseen and unheard and pressed his shoulder. His head jerked up violently. He saw his wife, a slim shadow against the light of the exit.

Her fingers pulled the cigarette away from the moist grip of his lips and flipped it out into the night. "You know what a fuss they make about smoking on stage, Paul."

"I know." His voice was dull.

"Honey, you were not as bad as that, you were good."

He did not answer.

"Paul, I mean it—you were good."

"Characters, always I have to play characters," he said.

"You could play Kent."

"Not in that competition. I know, Glory. I heard Mitch Fallon talking to the others. I heard what Mitch said."

Paul would not look up at her. He looked down at the white tension of his hands.

"What did Mitch say?"

"He said he envisioned Kent as a man of heroic proportions. Is that my trouble, Glory? No heroic proportions."

His wife would not argue. She sensed instinctively that argument would only discourage him more. She sat beside him on the stair, leaning against his shoulder, letting her breath—her comforting warm woman breath—embrace his hard shoulders and caress the rigid muscles of his throat. . . .

Mitchell Fallon crouched alone in the pit with a clipboard in his lap, balanced on his toes, stroking the point of his chin, forgetting briefly the description which had been tagged on him years ago for this same ungainly pose. A young actress had said he looked just like a cloven-hoofed Pan, and Fallon had countered that she was politely calling him an old goat; but the girl insisted that Pan was for Panic, the emotion with which the little director inspired all beginners, a panic which was quickly dispelled by the warm gentility of his voice.

Fallon was too worried now to think of nicknames and appearances. He ran his sharp fingertip down the left-hand column of his casting list:

Lear
France
Burgundy
Cornwall
Albany
Kent
Gloucester
Edgar
Edmund
Curan
Oswald
Fool

The finger stopped at "Fool" and flipped to the right-hand side of the sheet, exploring shakily down the column of live actors:

Pomeroy
Sewell
Riordan
Enright
Clift

With a flash of inspiration, Fallon sprang to his feet.
"Clift! Loren Clift!"

The young man who had performed Oswald opposite Sewell's Kent—the dancer with the beautiful sense of stage movement—ran lithely down into the pit. Fallon spoke to him, quietly and earnestly. "Mr. Clift, do you remember reading Edgar this afternoon?"

"Edgar?" Clift's fine black brows shot up attentively. "Yes, sir."

"I am not thinking of Edgar the hero," Fallon said dryly. "I am thinking of Edgar disguised as Poor Tom, the beggar. There was a tragic quality in Poor Tom that made me think of Lear's Fool."

"Lear's Fool?" Clift's delicate nostrils lifted.

Fallon smiled. "You're a ballet man, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, the King's Fool in this play is pure ballet. His whole performance is a kind of comi-tragic dance, a beautiful background to the growing madness of Lear. I want you to do the heath scene for me, the way you did Poor Tom. Try it, will you?"

Clift's handsome face was impassive except for the fine white tautness along the lips. His eyes played swiftly over the line of actors on the lower terraces. "Yes, of course," he said, in a strained voice but there was no strain in the fine spiralling twist of his body that carried him in a single bound over the railing and on to the stage.

Fallon called suddenly for John Pomeroy, the director, and the big bronze man strolled leisurely down the aisle, thumbing the leaves of his script. He read Lear's lines with a tremendous ease and volume. Gradually, while Loren Clift leaped and crouched and danced about the heath, the harrowing, storm-ridden madness of the great wild king began to appear. Halfway through the scene, Mitchell Fallon, who was not often given to committing himself, swung fully around to face Whitaker, the third director. Fallon gestured significantly with his right hand, the thumb and forefinger forming a perfect circle. . . .

"Paul, guess what."

"What?"

Glory raised her head from her husband's shoulder.
"I have found myself a room-mate."

"Room-mate?" Paul Enright roused suddenly from his mood. "You?"

"Yes, Paul. Did you happen to notice that girl, the blonde, the one Mitch keeps trying out as Cordelia?"

"I noticed all right. She has been all over the place making like God's gift to tragedy."

"I think she is nice."

"I agree. She is very nice. Very cosy for you." Paul's tone was derisive. "Have you told her who was your old room-mate at U.C.L.A.?"

"No, I haven't. Not yet."

"That's just dandy! And where am I supposed to get my sleep this summer? On a park bench?"

"Hush, Paul. You don't have to shout."

He leaped angrily to his feet, and his wife rose anxiously beside him.

"Darling, it will be all right," she said. "I could not just live by myself. Mother will expect me to have a room-mate when she comes out this summer. The girl's name is Ethel Tucker."

"Who gives a damn what her name is?"

"Hush." There was no use arguing with Paul, she knew. They had talked this all out before, this unnatural separation, and there was no other way, though Paul would not admit it. He was only being hard on her choice of a room-mate to release the hard anger in himself. The summer would be worse for him, the man—the unmarried marriage, the living together yet not together, the guilty stolen passages of love where there should be no guilt. She could not protest with words any more; she could only hold Paul with her arms, promise him with her lips, assure him with herself. . . .

At last she felt him relaxing, weakening. His lips pressed down on the side of her throat, and his hand

slid around her waist, working under her shirt and down the bare curve of her hip. "Paul, for heaven's sake, someone might walk right in the stage door!"

"Let 'em walk." His laugh was harsh against her ear. "Just a couple of old room-mates saying good-bye."

"Paul!"

She forced herself away from him, but she kept her hot grip on his hand and urged him not outward but deeper into the darkness. They stumbled and laughed climbing the stairs to the balcony. They had turned the angle of the second flight of stairs, locked together, breathless and impatient, when Glory drew back with a gasp. Paul looked upward.

Above them, at the head of the stairs, where the glow from the outer stage filtered through the draughty balconies, a square of pale twilight framed the head and shoulders of a man. He sat silently, motionlessly.

Words sprang involuntarily into Paul's mind, but he did not speak them. . . . Night watchman. . . .

He sensed, uncannily, that the words were both true and untrue. It was night and the watcher on the stairs was a man.

Night . . . watch . . . man. . . .

In unspoken agreement, not quite knowing why, the Enrights backed slowly, apologetically, down the stairs. Outside, in the cooler invisibility of the park, alone in darkness, they could not bring themselves to laugh at the incident. They clung together, trembling, while the night wind stroked their faces as gently as a lover's hands.

Loren Clift felt that he had died a splendid death. He had simply faded away, a weird dwindling shadow, in the deeper shadows of the inner stage. Even a Fool could die splendidly, and he was a King's Fool. If Loren Clift must be a Fool, he would be a King's Fool, King of Fools. He would die like a king.

The scene with Lear on the heath was over. Clift glided

off alone into the black well of backstage, spun three times on one toe and leaped straight up into the air as high as his own shoulders. It was a trick he had invented which he amusingly called jumping out of his skin. Whenever he felt a gloomy lack of confidence creeping over him—an intolerable trait for a dancer—he simply leaped outside himself, looked on as a spectator, and decided that anyone so handsome, so physically perfect, so superbly gifted, could not possibly be a failure at anything.

Free of his doubts, Clift stood alone in the dark, musing. So Fallon was not going to reward him with the role of Edgar. That was obvious. Very well. There were half a dozen Edgars out front, without distinction, a barrelful of handsome Edgars, of shining apples, all alike, red apples, not a golden one in the lot.

He, Loren Clift, would be the golden apple, the only man who could play the Fool. He would dance the mad king right out of this world. That would be quite a trick, to steal the heath scene from King Lear himself.

Chuckles confidently, as if that feat were already accomplished, Clift looked about at the ghostly inner structure of the stage. He saw a stairway going up into a filmy, dusty darkness and decided to explore the place.

He went up like a wraith, pausing only once at the turn of the stairs when the blackness overhead seemed to take on a quality of motion. He decided the movement was only the forward progress of his eyes describing a shifting pattern of light. He went on up to confront a doorway that opened into absolute darkness. He gave that up as dangerous—there had been some warning about the floor in the costume room—and turned left along a corridor that took him out into a kind of elevated stage. Through a thin gauze curtain the light drifted in like mist. Beyond the curtain he could see the shadowy spokes of the main balcony rail. This had been described by Mitchell Fallon as “the inner above,” one of the secondary acting areas. In an alcove at the deep right

were stored odds and ends of furniture, huge benches and thrones, receding into a vague and dusty silence. The medieval nature of the structure suggested some gloomy abandoned castle.

Loren Clift had an imagination that gave strange wings to his feet. Rhythmically, his hips loosely weaving, he sauntered back and forth behind the curtain. Through the thin mesh he could see most of the main stage, but he knew that he himself could not be seen.

Almost directly beneath him a dozen men and women were reading the big opening scene of the play: Lear and his three daughters, the court nobles, and the foreign suitors. The youngest daughter, Cordelia, was speaking. Clift knew her; his eyes had been full of her all day. Her real name was Ethel Tucker.

"Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my heart into my mouth . . ."

Cordelia's gold-blond head was thrown back, her face lifted so that Clift could see straight down into her eyes, beautiful, deep, unwavering. It was a strange sensation to look into a girl's eyes without being seen. It was like studying one's living image in a pool. Clift imagined his own reflection there in the liquid colour of her eyes.

"Obey you, love you, and most honour you . . ."

Cordelia gave a maidenly sweetness to the words, like a wedding vow. Clift's conceit was so simple and unchallenged, he could believe that she spoke directly to him. All day long he had been dancing for the eyes of this lovely blond girl, and now she saw him; she saw, with her eyes, her naked eyes.

He would dance the Fool for the rest of them, he would be their Fool in rags, but this one girl would see beneath the rags—this golden girl, golden Ethel.

Clift glanced excitedly over each shoulder. He was absolutely alone here. No one could possibly see. . . . The strange ritual which followed was a silent confession of how much he wanted to act himself, his brilliant, light-footed, light-hearted self. Secretly, he despised the Fool,

the ragged, dirty, dying Fool. The role had been handed him like a slap in the face. Someone in the audience had laughed outright at his wild dance on the heath.

Clift's fingers raced up the buttons of his shirt and peeled it from his shoulders. He would be their Fool, but not for this one girl, this golden one, golden Ethel. For her he would be Loren Clift, the dancer.

"So young, my lord, and true . . ."

Cordelia was backing out of the action on the stage, leaning against a pillar, head thrown back, pale, her eyes half closed.

Loren Clift's bare shoulders began to twist, a snake-like motion, confined to the upper body. His fingers moved without the guidance of thought, unsnapping his belt. The little metallic sound broke the freeze of his hips, releasing his whole body in a violent upward bound. When he came down his old jeans tumbled all the way to his ankles. He kicked out of them, his feet sliding easily out of his loose sandals.

His freedom was immeasurable. He leaped fantastically through the shadows. If they could see him dancing now!

The voices below rose like a storm—the Earl of Kent defending Cordelia against her father. Clift's weightless leaps made no more impression on the actors beneath him than the flight of a moth. Except one. She leaned dreamily against the pillar, her head thrown back, her eyes closed. Hesitating in his dance beside the curtained rail, Clift looked down upon the steep white slant of Ethel Tucker's throat, like a vast incline of cool snow. He danced on the cool snow.

When he paused again by the rail, quivering in every muscle, the girl's eyes were open, her head erect, her golden head, but he knew she was not really on the stage with the others. The faint little smile on her lips had joined him here in the dreamy violence of his dance.

Some day he would tell her how he had danced above her, invisibly, danced on her head, her golden head.

Her golden maidenhead.

He whirled and arched and kicked. His dance was outside reason. It was complete abandon.

Ethel Tucker was not really aware of Loren Clift. Though he had noticed her all day she knew him only as a name vaguely connected with a face and a rather graceful manner. She leaned against the pillar in a state of exhaustion, not in a transcendent delight. She wished that Mr. Fallon would make up his mind. She could not possibly give more to the try-out than she had already given. The air of silent assent which seemed to greet every one of her attempts at Cordelia was embarrassing and confusing. The afternoon had been exciting, but the night had faded into a blur of faces, male faces. Would she ever know a man as one person, one human being again, or would man always be this complex monster who had cursed, wooed, embraced, banished and loved her, all in one terrible, emotional day?

She sagged against the stage pillar, weak in every limb. If she had to speak another line she would faint dead away, and that would be the end of Cordelia, of Ethel Tucker, of everything. An actress had to be tough. If this was the test of toughness, the initiation, she would be lucky to survive.

Her mind swam. The male faces danced. Mr. Enright Riordan Clift Van Horn Sewell Pomeroy. Face, eyes, head, body, motion, not one man, but all men. Her hands pressed against her ears, her eyes closed tightly. Shut them out, all of them. She wanted to scream. If not, she was going to faint.

Mitchell Fallon stopped the scene just in time.

"That's all," Fallon said.

That *was* all. Ethel Tucker agreed. She would not come on this stage again tonight.

When the other actors drifted toward the railing and the pit, where Fallon had called them for a general consultation, Ethel Tucker was not among them. She walked

quietly off under the balcony, where the darkness felt soothingly empty. No people. No actors. For just a little bit she wanted to be all by herself.

The wish was to be denied, after all. She could see the square of the outside stage exit, and beyond it she could hear voices, a pair of voices, coming closer. She recognized the low contralto of that friendly girl who had wanted to share a room with her, accompanied by a deeper, man's voice.

Something rebelled. Ethel Tucker could not stand another voice, another face, right now. She wanted to rest alone, to recover something of herself.

She saw the stairway climbing into welcome darkness. She was not afraid of the dark. A thousand nights of her life she had climbed dark stairs to her bed.

Swiftly and silently, Ethel Tucker ran up the stairs turning toward the glow from the outer stage. Her haste ended abruptly with a soundless cry at what she saw in weaving silhouette against the light. For a moment she stood there, wavering on the edge of something like pure terror, before she turned and ran down the stairs. . . .

3

Mitchell Fallon stood at the rail of the stage, hands thrust deep in his pockets, staring up for a moment at the night sky. He began to speak in a low confiding voice designed to reach only the nearer of the expectant actors. "I feel like drafting a couple of the planets when it comes to casting the roles of the sons of Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund, True and False, hero and villain, black and white—I wish it were that simple! In some ways they are the most complex characters in the play. Edgar's is a complexity of characterization. He is an actor within an actor, both stupid and loyal, a fugitive, a beggar, a warrior, and a hero. He is not so hard to understand but

very difficult to play. Edmund's, however, is a complexity of soul. I have never yet seen an actor who realized all the possibilities of Edmund—”

“Mitch!” It was the big voice of John Pomeroy, who rose hugely, stretched and sauntered down the aisle on his soft crêpe soles. “May I read Edmund, Mitch?”

“Edmund? The bastard?” The little director's jaw hung loosely in surprise. “Why—yes, John. Surely. What scene?”

“The soliloquy.”

“Which soliloquy?”

Pomeroy thought a moment before the words came to him: “‘Why bastard? Wherefore base? When my dimensions are as well compact, my mind as generous, and my shape as true. . . .’”

Fallon bowed, handsomely. “‘An interlude.’ The stage is yours, Mr. Pomeroy.”

“You think I am joking, Mitch?”

“Casting is no joke. Your dimensions are as well compact as any other Edmund's.”

Fallon came down to join the tight expectant circle of actors, and Pomeroy was alone on the stage, fully aware of his audience, himself, his breadth and depth, his big shoulders thrown back, breathing deeply, face lifted proudly to address the moon:

“‘Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law my services are bound. . . .’”

It was a primitive speech, a bold and animal challenge to the offending universe. Pomeroy had given no more than this to his reading of Lear. His voice rang out beyond the immediate listening, leaped the walls, and beat against the night. When he had finished there was a spontaneous flutter of applause.

Pomeroy lowered his head, the spotlight playing trickily with the fine gold streaks in his hair. He pocketed the play script on his hip, folded his arms, and walked calmly back to the casting bench. The directors' heads came together briefly.

"John, what was the meaning of that performance?" Dan Whitaker wanted to know. "Are you thinking of doubling as a blond Edmund and a white-headed Lear?"

Pomeroy never allowed his smiles to become grins. "Frankly, I cannot imagine a blond Edmund. Edmund is black, all through, black heart, black eyes, black hair."

"Blackness," Whitaker said inconsequentially, "is only the absence of light."

Mitchell Fallon was likewise puzzled. "It was a nice bit of reading—sort of relieved me for a moment, cleared the air—but I cannot think why you should do it, John, what you were trying to prove."

Whitaker laughed. "John does not have to prove anything. He is a natural, if I have ever seen one, born under a very bright star."

"'Under the Dragon's Tail,'" Pomeroy corrected.

"Not you, John. You're an honest issue, pure gold, hard as gold too, but pure. You're the legitimate, John, so what's this with you and Edmund, the illegitimate?"

"We do not cast any role to type in this theatre, Daniel—"

"So it says in the manual! You're no Edmund and never will be, but that was a beautiful reading, and what the devil got into you to do it?"

Pomeroy smiled mysteriously. "The devil."

Whitaker and Fallon both lifted their shoulders uncomprehendingly.

"Gentlemen, it is very simple," Pomeroy explained. "That was my glove, my gauntlet. 'He that dares approach, on him, on you, who not? I will maintain my truth and honour firmly.'"

"I get it!" Whitaker's enthusiasm was aroused. "A challenge. Anybody who can match that reading of Edmund—"

"The challenge was not quite so universal as you think, Daniel. I am afraid it was distinctly personal."

"A personal challenge?" Mitchell Fallon glanced quickly over one shoulder. "You mean Sewell?"

"Yes, Sewell. Mr. Barney Sewell." Pomeroy bit the names off like bits of sharp thin bone between his teeth.

"I gather, John, that you do not like Mr. Sewell."

"I do not like a man who has the stuff and doesn't use it. That voice Sewell used for reading Edmund would not have filled the inside of a telephone booth!"

Mitchell Fallon nodded. "I know. I agree. I do not understand Sewell myself. So! Shall I call him up again?"

"That," John Pomeroy said with a thin, amused smile, "was the general idea. . . ."

There was nothing in the man's posture to indicate that he accepted the challenge. Sewell had been found backstage, but he must have heard Pomeroy's reading, though he did not see it. He slouched against a pillar, holding the script close to his hip, which drew his eyes and mouth away from the audience, almost upstage. The crooked stance, dropping the right shoulder and bearing heavily on the right foot, was characteristic of him, as if he were always in the act of turning away from direct social contact. His eyes never looked at a person straight, down the bridge of the nose, but at a steep leftish slant across the shoulder, the angle of a bowsman sighting along the shaft of his arrow.

"Mr. Sewell!" Mitchell Fallon sprang to his feet with a steely twang in his voice. "Sewell, I would not say Edmund was relaxed in this scene. He is defiant, but his defiance comes from inner tension. He is a born outlaw, a jackal on the wilderness fringe of society, and he should feel both the strength and the fear of the outlaw—'Who in the lusty stealth of nature, take more composition and fierce quality'—Did you notice that fierce quality in the reading of Mr. Pomeroy?"

Barney Sewell moved away from the pillar. Fallon liked the lithe, weightless quality of his walk as he came out to the apron.

"There you are, Mr. Sewell. There's Edmund. That is the way Edmund would walk!"

Sewell's foot hesitated, then came down uneasily on the stage rail. His eyes slanted down on Fallon left-sidedly, his chin almost resting on the left shoulder. His brows were black and shaggy, depressing toward the inner corners.

"You have Edmund's walk," Fallon said. "Now give me the voice."

Sewell licked his lips. His words were audible only to Fallon. "Are you asking me to read like Mr. Pomeroy?"

The director hesitated, glancing over his shoulder. "Mmmmm, well—I think Pomeroy understands Edmund."

"Does he?" It was not sarcasm in the voice, and yet Fallon sensed a deeper question than the words expressed. "I am afraid I cannot read like Mr. Pomeroy."

"Not *like* him, not anything like him." Fallon's manner was friendly and polite. "All I want is that same 'fierce quality.' Look, Mr. Sewell—who is Edmund speaking to in this scene? To me, to the audience, to himself? No, he's shouting at the farthest star, the last star, outside the universe. The outlaw star. That was the star of his birth. Can you hit that star for me, Mr. Sewell? That's all I am asking you—whisper if you like, but whisper to that last, lone, frightened, outside, outraged star.... Do that for me, Mr. Sewell, and *you are Edmund!*"

Fallon turned on his heel and walked stiffly up the aisle, more alert than his manner revealed, waiting....

Sewell began to read, and Fallon could hear not the words but the after-words, the strange echo that came from the hollow curves of this great shell; and Fallon could see the faces of his friends, Pomeroy and Whitaker, could see them leaning over the casting-table, elbow to elbow, jaws level, eye-level, listening....

"Why brand they us with base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base? Who, in the lusty stealth of nature....?"

Fallon did not turn around. He folded his arms and

listened. He did not need to see. Sewell had the brutish size, the brooding strength, even the angry colour of an Edmund, but did he have the spirit?

The voice was reaching, reaching, and Fallon felt it whip past his shoulders like a clear cold shaft of wind and go whistling into the black pit of night toward that farthest nameless star:

“ ‘Fine word—legitimate! Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed, and my invention thrive, Edmund the base shall top th’ legitimate. I grow. I prosper.’ ”

Fallon could feel the growth, the immense shadow falling across the amphitheatre. It was big. It was terrible. It was Edmund:

“ ‘Now, gods, stand up for bastards!’ ”

4

Ethel Tucker’s hamburger was a complicated and artistic achievement, overflowing with sliced vegetables, relish and tomato sauce. She thought of herself as a little girl, indelicately attacking a watermelon, lost to the ears. When she had eaten all but a limp and shapeless crescent of greasy bun she dropped it in the napkin on her lap, carefully wiped her mouth and her slender fingers, sighed happily, and looked around.

The terrace of the little all-night refreshment stand was crowded with actors, smoking, laughing, disputing the procedure of casting, doubting, and waiting. Especially waiting.

The directors had gone off to Mitch Fallon’s house for an all-night debate of their own. The try-out was over. The decision, as Ollie Van Horn kept shouting, was “in the laps of the gods.”

Ollie dragged two squealing girls down on his knees to share the lap of “one of the lesser gods.” The girls seemed to like it. Ethel Tucker watched them with a quiet,

twisted little smile, wondering how she would react to that kind of horseplay now. She felt oddly grown apart, an adult among children. Briefly she recalled the strange thing that had happened to her when Billy Lewiston died. With Billy her youth had seemed to be gone for ever.

Shy as she was of the other actors they also seemed to be shy of her. Occasionally, a little whisper and a glance would include her in the general merriment. Ethel sat on the cold cement wall of the terrace under the pale starlight with a little empty space on each side. She wore a thin yellow sweater—the night air was chill and damp—and finally she had to bring the knees of her brown slacks up to her chin, hugging her ankles, to keep warm.

She came out of a reverie to discover that the space on each side had filled in with a solid male shoulder. At her left she discovered a long delicate face that made her withdraw impulsively toward the man on the right, who remarked in a friendly way: "Getting a bit thick, isn't it?"

"The air, you mean?" Ethel Tucker glanced quickly up at him.

She recalled feeling a certain kinship with this solid, angular, dependable face, the first face she had seen in this strange town, which made it less strange than all the others.

"The air is all right." He spoke carelessly with a full British flavour. "Londonish sort of damp in it. Makes me homesick."

"Me too. We have this kind of air in San Francisco."

"I know. Great town, Frisco."

"Oh—have you lived there?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have. I live wherever I happen to be. I am a native of the universe."

"Oh." She filled her breast with the good air. "That must be a wonderful way to feel."

"I have no option on the feeling," he said, grinning. "Nor the air, either. They ar., not yet rationing the atmosphere of this embattled planet, not even in Britain."

The last was spoken with a wry, affectionate note of sarcasm. "By the way, my name is Riordan—Tony Riordan."

"Oh, I know that," she said, smiling. "Actresses circulate gossip like an afternoon bridge club."

"Well, you have no scandals to report on me—not yet."

"If that means there will be some later, I assure you, Mr. Riordan, I am all ears."

"On the contrary, Miss Tucker, I would say you are all eyes and golden hair."

She felt annoyed with the sudden rising pulse beat in her throat, the impulse to turn away from him—and the only way to turn was to the left, where the other man waited, smiling.

"Hi!"

"Hi," Ethel Tucker said.

"My name is Loren Clift."

"Oh yes, I—I've seen you—"

He grinned impishly. "Guess you have, at that."

Ethel Tucker felt a ridiculous panic as if the two pairs of shoulders were pressing in on her, inescapably.

"Old Fallon really put me through the paces tonight," Clift went on. "Just to make a Fool out of me."

"Oh, I don't think—"

She looked up suddenly to see the boyish slyness in Loren Clift's smile, and then she understood him and laughed.

"You'll make a wonderful Fool," she said.

"Coming from you, I may stand for that," Clift said. "I was about ready to cash in my chips and go home."

"Really? Were you disappointed in the try-out?"

He shrugged. "Oh, I suppose my conception of Shakespeare, backwoods style, was typical of Hollywood. I had figured on nothing less than Hamlet for myself. Now I know better. There was some high-powered acting out there tonight."

Ethel Tucker felt herself warming a little to the young dancer.

Clift nodded toward a figure standing near the rail in the farther darker corner of the terrace. "The man over there—what was his name, Sewell? He was like nothing I have heard in Hollywood since Marlon Brando came out to do *Street Car*."

"Are you from Hollywood?" The question seemed unnecessary.

"Physically, yes. Spiritually I'm not sure where I belong."

"Right here," she said. "Maybe?"

He looked down at her with a sudden piercing violence. She could feel a leaping pulse of muscle from his wrist to his shoulder, and it made her shrink again toward the man on the right.

"Maybe," Loren Clift said.

Ethel Tucker saw she was not going to lack for attention now. Two other men came up, men she had never known before today, intimate, almost crowding her backward off the railing. This was the way of the theatre, way of youth, way of men. "Oh, Billy, Billy," she thought, shutting her eyes, wishing the eyes would come open to find her soldier standing there.

Opening them, she saw that the two men in front of her were gone; the cage was open—a straight clear tunnel of vision across the terrace framed the solid figure of another man who leaned in a dark corner, a shadow on his face, outside the chatter, warmth, confusion, outside and quite alone.

Not quite knowing why, except that it was entirely unlike her and she felt like doing it, Ethel Tucker stood up and walked straight toward him, impelled by the man's aloneness, until she stood there face to face with him. Almost. The top of her head just came to his chin, even though he stood with a noticeable slouch.

His expression did not change. Turning, he flattened himself stiffly against the inner wall.

'I liked your Edmund,' Ethel Tucker told him.

'Thank you.'

'You should get that role of Edmund. You must get it.'

"I think not," he said. His voice had that deep stage quality, the suggestion of unlimited power.

"Oh yes, yes. No one has read Edmund anywhere near as well. Unless—were you thinking of some other role?"

"I was not thinking of Edmund."

"Really? I could have sworn you had known those lines all your life."

She could not quite see his eyes in the shadow, but she could hear the hesitation in his breathing, could feel it—for she was so close, the terrace so crowded, that his rising breast actually pressed for a moment against her own, and she was amazed that he was the one who withdrew from the pressure, growing thinner and taller against the wall.

"We haven't met, have we? My name is Sewell," he said.

"Mine is Ethel Tucker."

"I assume you will be Cordelia."

"Now we're trading compliments."

"You did very well, Miss Tucker."

"I have a lot to learn."

"Possibly."

Well, that was frank enough, she thought. He certainly was not one of these shouldering flatterers.

She laughed. "You know, if you are Edmund and I am Cordelia we may never speak another word together all summer, Mr. Sewell. We never meet in the play, as I remember. You just do away with me at the end and that's all. I wonder how Edmund could be so cruel—to a perfect stranger!"

Something distracted her attention, a scuffle led by Ollie Van Horn, and when it was over she turned to find the man's eyes hard upon her in the shadows. She felt that the eyes had not left her, had not wavered once from her

profile, and at the same time she felt the night lying cold on her flesh, and she drew the sweater up tightly about her throat, shivering.

"Good luck—Edmund," she said.

The man did not answer. Not knowing what more to say, she walked away, resisting the desire to look back, to know that his eyes followed her. She could not walk away from the cold, though. The night followed her and lay moistly almost as if it had life, upon her hands and her face, and crept unpleasantly under the buttoned collar of her sweater.

On the terrace the sandwiches and sodas were mostly gone from the tables now, the early sociabilities fading to stiff, polite little silences. No one dared to take the initiative of breaking up the party, for fear all eyes would follow him away, and all tongues immediately take up his name.

Ethel felt a hand on her arm.

"Going home?" It was Loren Clift, the dancer.

"It's not far."

"Too bad. I had hoped it would be miles."

And so, rather arrogantly, the young man claimed her for his partner. They walked slowly up the slanting street while other groups broke suddenly in all directions from the terrace, most of them finding rides.

"We could get a lift uptown, I suppose," Loren Clift said without enthusiasm.

"I'm right up there, at the hotel," she said.

"Really? Don't tell me you're a golden girl!"

She looked at him, not understanding.

"The cosmopolitan type. Miss Bank of America."

She laughed. "My father is a contractor."

"There's plenty of money in that. I know. I have a friend who bought a house."

"I'm only staying at the hotel until I find another place."

She could feel the smooth motion of his body beside hers and feel his eyes slyly tracing her profile. She looked straight ahead, matching his stride easily.

"Nights sure get cold up here, don't they?" he said.

There was something not quite innocent about the way he spoke, a kind of stroking softness in his voice that made her flesh tremble as if light fingertips had raced down her arm.

He must have noticed her stiff unresponsiveness, for he began to talk rapidly, ramblingly, about himself, until they stood together under the hotel marquee.

"Well, Mr. Clift." She gave him her hand in a casual way.

A smile slanted confidently across his handsome young face. He looked her hand over, front and back. "What am I supposed to do? Wrap this up and take it with me?"

"I was just wishing you luck."

"If you really wished me luck, you'd wish me a walk around the block. How about it?"

"Is that the Hollywood approach?"

"If you prefer the Continental—" He bent very stiffly and kissed the back of her hand.

"I just don't know about you," she said, frankly.

His face came up, grinning. "Oh, yes, you do. You know all about me."

She draw back from the laughing boldness of his eyes, and a picture flashed across her mind, unreal, the Shakespearian theatre, the balcony, darkness, and a dancing, unbelievable shadow of a man. She backed away, but he held on to her hand.

She worked her hand in his tight fingers, trying not to reveal her sudden breathless weakness. The street was lighted, but it was almost empty. She turned and saw one single person moving in the whole town. Miraculously, all the actors had vanished on their various ways, all but one. She sighed, inaudibly, seeing the comfortable dimensions of the man who walked down the opposite side of the street. There was something about the muscularity, the bigness of him that gave her a sense of security.

She could not know, at this distance, that the big man saw her too with eyes slanting back over his left shoulder; that a kind of fragrance passed between them and he breathed it deeply, and the thing he breathed was Innocence. . . .

"Good night, Mr. Clift."

"Well, if you must—"

"I must."

Clift gave up her hand reluctantly, and the back of it was still wet from the cool pressure of his lips.

She took a step. The big man was less than a block away.

"Say, Miss Tucker," Loren Clift said.

"Yes."

"Take that hand I kissed and put it under your cheek tonight. It has my guarantee for your sweet rest."

"You're poetic, Mr. Clift."

"I'm excited, Miss Tucker. I'll dance all the way home."

"The Fool on the Heath."

"Yes—Fool. Watch me go." He shot off down the street, in long, graceful leaps.

She turned, smiling, to go into the hotel, and the big man she expected to see had disappeared. It gave her a strange start. The street down there, where she had seen him before, where she must have seen him, was a row of quiet dark store fronts, empty. Not even a shadow.

She went into the hotel, puzzled. A man sitting on the nearest divan folded his newspaper.

"Oh. Mr. Riordan. Hello."

"Better good night, I should say."

"It is that time, isn't it?"

She went on to claim her room key. The clerk had to leave his desk to run her up in the elevator. She turned to find the Englishman stepping into the elevator cage. He looked down at her, smiling, and she found her dry lips could not manage the floor number.

"Five," Anthony Riordan said.

"That's my floor, too," Ethel Tucker said, hastily. She looked hard at the clerk's straight back. The elevator rumbled upward.

Riordan smiled. "I know, Miss Tucker. I am on the sixth floor, myself."

5

The blond young man ran a nervous fingertip down the casting notice, reading aloud the names that concerned him. "Lear, King of Britain, John Pomeroy . . . Earl of Kent, Paul Enright—"

"Kent!" he said, excitedly. "They gave me Kent!" A slim pair of arms slid lightly around him. Paul Enright turned and kissed his wife full on the mouth. "Though I don't exactly see how I made it."

"I do, Paul. I do."

His finger continued, carelessly now, down the casting-list, pausing at a pair of names.

"Edgar, son to Gloucester, Anthony Riordan . . . The Englishman got Edgar. The hero. That's good . . . Edmund, bastard son to Gloucester, Barney Sewell. . . . Well, that explains why I'm Kent. Sewell was needed more in the role of Edmund."

"Paul, you were not a second choice. I won't have you thinking—"

He gripped her chin lightly with one hand. "Hold on, baby. I don't care what choice I am. The point is what I can make of the role." He went on reading. "Fool, Loren Clift . . . That's the boy from Hollywood, the dancer. I think he wanted Edgar, but let it go, he'll be a perfect Fool."

"Very aptly put, darling."

"Oswald, servant to Goneril, Oliver Van Horn . . . Good. Ollie got himself a nice bit of comedy there . . . Daughters to Lear—I don't see your name, Glory."

"Think nothing of it. Here I am over here in the history play. I did very well, don't you think?"

"A tavern wench! How could they think of you? You didn't even read the part."

"Remember the hag I played last year?"

"Oh, yes—the hag. That's when I fell in love with you. See a woman at her worst before you marry her, they told me."

"So you picked the worst in sight."

"It worked," he said, grinning. "Now you look better to me every day...."

Not all of the individual reactions to casting were as pleasant as the Enrights'. Throughout the morning a stream of actors drifted past the stage entrance, some arriving timidly and leaving with assumed nonchalance, some forming little knots of argument, discontented or speculative, not quite approving the will of the gods—in this case of the directors—but only to the point of scepticism, rarely to the extreme of open revolt.

Now and then an actor might turn away in disgust with a mutterred "I'm wasting my time here," but this type was unusual, and it was true he did not belong. The summer theatre had no place for him because he could see himself only as an actor, not as a unit in a dramatic story. In a theatre devoted above all else to a playwright and his plays, no one quite succeeded—not even Mitchell Fallon himself—in becoming more important than William Shakespeare.

There was a noticeable element of timing involved in the arrivals. The eager and the doubtful came first, followed by the busier members of the organization, the habitual early risers, the press agent, the technicians, the office girl. Late in the morning, staging their appearances with professional indifference, came the troupers, the old hands, the poseurs, those described by Ollie Van Horn as the "what-the-hell boys."

For a pair of old hands, Paul and Glory Enright were

well ahead of schedule. With Van Horn they sat on a bench just inside the stage door and amused themselves by watching the long, casual, curious parade past the casting notices.

Ethel Tucker came early and timidly. She wore a yellow sleeveless sweater and green slacks, reminding Ollie Van Horn of an unplucked daffodil.

"I know you. You're the theatre's most beautiful Cordelia," he greeted.

"Cordelia? Am I really?"

"Get that! 'Am I really?'" Van Horn said mockingly. His long, limp, unkempt hair was a part of his assumed wildness. He was constantly stroking back the damp strands with dramatic fingers. "Honey, you were Cordelia from the day you were born!"

Ethel Tucker's natural dignity responded shyly to humour. She found it difficult to laugh outright, and lately experience had given her little cause for laughing. "That would be type casting," she said seriously, "and, anyway, I'm not really the Cordelia type."

"Well, step right into Dr. Van Horn's Saturday clinic and take the blood test, honey. Let's find out your type for sure!"

The girl from San Francisco did not know what to make of the boy from Detroit. Smiling, she sat cautiously on the edge of the bench.

"Are you still living at the hotel?" Glory Enright asked her.

"Yes, I am. Do you still want a room-mate?"

Ollie Van Horn grinned broadly, folding his arms, and showing his large teeth. He turned directly toward the newcomer, his big shoulders completely blocking her view of the Enrights. "Let's imagine these two people are not around, honey, and start that last line over."

Paul Enright reached around his wife to slap Van Horn on the shoulder. "Save your humour for the dressing-room mirrors, Ollie. This is a lady."

Van Horn grinned. "She'll learn. In this hotbed of

iniquity she'll learn." He twisted his head monkishly, studying Ethel Tucker's face. "On careful thought I will not change a single word of that statement. I repeat, in this hotbed—"

"Oh, shut up, Ollie!"

Van Horn chattered on, harmlessly, and the two girls, accepting him with hopeless little gestures of the hands, went on talking around him and over him. Paul Enright listened to them with a gradual hardening of the jaw, an increasing steeliness of the eyes that Ethel Tucker could see but could not understand. . . .

Glory said she had found a little cabin with a view across the valley and lovely wooded hills all around. The landlady wanted a pair of girl renters, no more than two, and it was perfectly private, intimate, with a path up from the road. They could live exactly as they pleased!

Ethel nodded, contrasting in the back of her mind the excitement of this red-headed Glory and the dismay of the man who sat beside her. Yes, dismay. Ethel Tucker thought she knew people very well for her age, and it was shocking to feel that this nice-looking Paul Enright was jealous of her, did not want her sharing that room on the mountain with the girl named Glory Roberts. Her mind alive with queer suspicions, Ethel was almost ready to say no she had other plans, to get away from this Glory person as fast as she could. There were strange, possessive women, dangerous half-women, and this boy Paul might know of such things . . . but Glory herself suddenly resolved the doubt by poking Ollie Van Horn in the back and sharply demanding, "Ollie, go away!"

Van Horn threw up his hands. "Go away, the lady says. A cabin in the hills, no less, with a private path, no less, and here is my imagination creeping up the path—the door opens, and the lady says go away! Van Horn, thou must be losing thy grip!"

"I mean it, Ollie. Go take a walk. This is a private matter."

"I'll go if Paul goes too," Ollie grumbled.

Paul agreed when his wife nudged him, and the two men went off to town, their reluctance based on altogether different motives—Paul feeling that he had somehow lost ground with himself, his wife, that he was not quite the stature of an Earl of Kent or any Earl, or any man; and Van Horn not bothered in the least by anything other than a trick of his mind which failed him at the last moment and left him without anything funny to say. A comic must always have his wit at the end of his tongue, and Ollie was only a half-master of the art. Sometimes he sparkled brilliantly and then again he only fizzled. The two men trudged down a steep sidewalk moodily, without a word for each other.

"First, I want you to know all about me," Glory Enright was saying to her new friend, Ethel, in a rapid whisper: "I am living a double life."

Ethel Tucker was startled by the melodramatic statement, but she felt relieved and then amused when Glory told of herself and Paul Enright and a marriage that was only half-fulfilled, of the folks at home who could not be told the truth, and of the mother who would soon arrive to interfere with their life.

"Won't your parents like your husband when they know him? I think he is very nice."

"Thanks for that!" Glory's voice carried a trace of her husband's dry, youthful cynicism. "I don't know. My parents are very close to me, and they are also very close, period! I mean, they've got buckets, but you would never know it. Mother can squeeze more food out of a dollar—I mean, to Paul and me a dollar is just small change, though I confess that may be wrong, because they have the stuff, my folks have, and Paul and I have nothing. Maybe that's why we have nothing; it's not in us to have things, not a necessary part of our lives."

Ethel's confusion showed on her face.

"Money, I mean," Glory rattled on. "There are people who live to earn and people who earn to live. I'm quoting Paul now. Paul has all the brains in our family. Paul and

I are the livers, and my poor folks are the earners, I guess, and who are we to criticize when we're still living off their earnings? Does that make sense to you?"

"Not very much," Ethel admitted. "I can understand your not knowing what to tell your parents, though. I had that problem myself."

Glory's eyes brightened, hopeful that she had discovered a kindred soul. She waited to be told, but Ethel only said, "I was never married."

"Oh."

That was all, just "oh," and what else was there to say? Just an "oh," a round "o," zero, nothing. Ethel felt the moist pain in her eyes, and Glory Enright saw it and thoughtfully said nothing.

They looked at each other, and right there they became fast friends.

"I thought a private cabin would be nice, because Paul could come up there." Glory's face turned a shade redder than her hair. "I mean—sometimes. If you wouldn't mind."

"I wouldn't mind, not a bit. Playing Cordelia will keep me all kinds of late hours at the theatre, I'm sure. Helping you two newlyweds to be together will make me feel like a romantic old duenna." Ethel Tucker spoke in an eager, husky undertone. For the first time since she had come here she felt happy, busy, a part of something more than herself. Her hands came out impulsively and clasped the other girl's wrists. "Listen, Mrs. En—Glory, thank you. Thank you very much for asking me to be your room-mate!"

By noon all but a few of the young actors had come to see the final published word on casting. A high level of good humour prevailed. "Old Mitch bats about .900 every year, you'll have to say that for him," Ollie Van Horn announced. "There are always a few sloppy bits, but the show will carry them. I, personally, look for a big season."

Van Horn delivered his comment with the pseudo

profundity of a Falstaff. His years of actual experience in the theatre reached a grand total of two, but he gave the impression of a long and full life devoted to Shakespeare, and to Mitchell Fallon.

There were three notable absences in the group that followed Van Horn down the curving path to the Town Square for lunch, notable especially to Ethel Tucker, who had been very much aware of the three last night.

Ethel came in with Paul and Glory Enright, and was amazed to find herself sliding into an immense red-cushioned oval and suddenly face to face with the enigma, the three missing men. All three together—one, two, three—conversing professionally over three cups of coffee.

There was an unnecessary flurry of introductions: "Have you met? . . . Oh, yes . . . Hello . . . Well, we split a hamburger last night. . . . Hotel mates. . . ."

There was no need to assort names. These three men were identities, not names. With her gift for quick insight Ethel Tucker knew that the thin handsome boy named Loren Clift had the ego of a bird, and the heart of one. A spiritual eagle. Loren Clift soared in a cloud of magnificent conceit, so magnificent that it must be admired. To receive the attention of a man so complete within himself must be regarded as a high compliment. Ethel smiled in greeting, and Clift's face became suddenly wonderfully young.

Anthony Riordan, the Englishman, was neither handsome nor ugly. The lines of his face were aggressive, but his grey-blue eyes were contrastingly mild. She had thought of his hair as dark and colourless, but now there was a noticeable wave of brown, a stubborn curly resistance to the comb. His teeth were good, though his smile was rarely broad enough to show them. Without any effort to be so, he was the most relaxed person in the group. His presence seemed to give the whole conversation a kind of steadiness and intelligence.

Barney Sewell, the nearest to Ethel in the opposite

aisle seat, so close that his large knees were drawn up awkwardly to avoid her own, was the least friendly. She had a rather startling impression that she looked in his eyes and saw nothing. The depth of them was not depth at all, it was depth beyond depth. This was absurd, of course. He spoke in a normal, quiet, unsmiling way. His handsomeness was nothing as definable as Loren Clift's. A strong nose, a large jaw, a mouth with a strange left-sided twist that was not amusement, nor irony, nor disdain, nor any quality that she could recognize. She thought of pain, but it was not quite pain, and yet it might be—not pain felt, but pain in contemplation. Pain of doubt, pain of sympathy?

Her eyes kept drifting back to Sewell's face, fleetingly. Why, of the three men, should she find him most distracting? Why not call him sullen, and let it go at that?

Yet he was not really sullen, he was just—beyond. That was it. He was beyond. He was out of reach. Their knees were not quite touching, inches short of physical contact, but some gulf between them was immeasurable.

Loren Clift sat almost diagonally from her in the booth, the farthest away in space, and all of a sudden among the confused bits of talk—Ollie Van Horn expounding wit in the booth behind them, and Paul Enright engaging the Englishman in reflections on the European war, where they had both seen combat—it came to Ethel that the dancer, Clift, had said something intended for herself alone and his eyes were waiting for her answer but there was nothing she could say.

Down under the table, where she could not look without embarrassment, Ethel felt something briefly nuzzling her ankle like the soft nose of a dog. A frown streaked across her face, and Loren Clift met it without a quaver in his pleasant smile.

“Sorry,” Clift said. “I have no control of them.”

She tried to fit his remark into some meaning that had come before, but the gap was still there, the words she had missed; and then she suddenly went stiff and her

hands coiled whitely where they rested on the table, for she knew he was speaking of his dancing feet and it was one of those feet which had lightly brushed her ankle, and there was no shoe on the foot.

"Some day they'll dance me right out of this world," he said.

She said nothing.

"Like last night."

She turned her eyes away, confused by this unanswerable boldness like nothing she had ever experienced or even heard of. Until now she had thought of herself as worldly for her age.

It annoyed her to think of those long slim legs and the unshod feet dancing under the table. She tried to draw forcibly away from Clift, causing herself an awkward angular discomfort. She realized, angrily, that she must press her silk-clad knees against the knees of Mr. Sewell, or else face straight at Mr. Clift, and the choice was not encouraged by Mr. Sewell's obvious disregard for anything but the tight hairy knots of his own hands.

"Grass is the softest dancing surface there is," Clift said, when her eyes came back to his. "I wish someone would invent an open-air theatre with a plot of grass for a stage. Then I could really dance!"

"Don't they have grass in Hollywood?" She tried to get some of her annoyance into her voice.

"Lots of it. I hurdle the hedges in Beverly Hills every morning just to stretch my muscles."

"In your pajamas, I suppose?"

"Or less," he said.

"Well, that must be a sight to wake the neighbours."

He grinned. "Or the neighbours' wives."

She felt suddenly a need for patience with this untuly impudent boy. There was a word for him, but she hesitated to use it.

She said: "I had a professor once who insisted that modern art had lost touch with moral values. I could not help thinking—"

She had no heart to go on with it.

His grin persisted. "You could not help thinking that ballet dancers must be immoral."

"I was speaking of artists," she corrected coldly.

He shrugged. "Let us not quibble over terms. Would you say an impulse to dance on grass, on the naked softness of the earth, is immoral?"

"Frankly, Mr. Clift, I am sorry I said anything at all!"

His irritating grin was there, and she could do nothing about it, but it finally gave way to hunger and he popped a cracker into his mouth, eating it in one whole gulp, the sharp corners grotesquely distorting his cheeks, and this procedure struck her as so completely good-natured, so thoughtless and wholesome, that she had to change her mind about him again. He would be a nuisance, all summer long perhaps, because there was obviously nothing hard or sharp enough in herself to touch him deeply, to hurt or even disturb him. It was useless to treat him as a normal person. He was an intellectual eccentric, a type she had known quite often in university in various forms. Her professor friend had said that the colleges were manufacturing the type wholesale; and then she had met Billy Lewiston, and he had been so completely a full-grown person, with the hard core of battle inside the gentle contour of the man, that all of the young college eccentrics bored her by contrast.

Here was another of them, an intellectual dancing eccentric. Loren Clift was not a university man, he was worse. He was a professional archetype of the university man. He believed in no God but himself, and even that image of God was a little obscure. He was sure of nothing so he pretended to be sure of everything with a sureness that was as ~~as~~ untoouchable as air.

Ethel Tucker smiled and relaxed and knew that she no longer had to be afraid of or even annoyed with Mr. Clift. She felt warm and renewed. She had made another friend. What is a friend but a stranger with whom one has suddenly reached an understanding?

Ethel Tucker was not quite sure when her friendship for the dancer began to set her apart from the others. It must have begun during the second week of rehearsals, when they were all feeling the early strain. One day she was groping desperately for lines, and the next day, with a final little extra surge of effort, she found she had accomplished that last subtle link between playwright and actor when the words of a dead poet were written indelibly on the tissue of a living mind.

At that point she began to feel a strange identity with the wistful, doomed heroine of the play. This quick mastery of the role gave her, quite suddenly, the opportunity to relax. It was a minor shock, then, to discover that she was lonely. Not so much at home, with Glory Enright, talking late into the night, sharing Glory's problems, but at the theatre, where she found herself surprisingly outside things. It took only one painful afternoon to recognize herself as an outcast and to discover the reason. Wherever she had gone in the past two weeks, involved in the character of Cordelia, she had been shadowed by Loren Clift. He was always there, holding her script, his arm locked with hers, his shoulder or his lap conveniently available for lazy intervals of staring at the blue summer sky. Now, alarmed, she saw that this dancing spider had spun a delicate, invisible web around her. No man came near, no woman spoke. There were only three possible explanations. The other people did not like her as a person; she was trying too hard to be a good actress, the best actress of them all . . . or they did not like her careless behaviour with Loren Clift; she was easy, too easy, submissive, secretly and scandalously possessed with and by him. . . . Or, if these reasons were not true, the fact remained that they did not

like Loren Clift himself, and she had lost face for being his friend.

The last answer made her temper rise hotly and loyally in his defence, but it was the right answer, and she found it out very abruptly one evening while dining alone at the Cascade Restaurant. Loren had gone home to put on some clothes; he always came in the afternoons in a pair of summer shorts and a T-shirt, nicely exhibiting his long, trim, tanned body, but the summer heat and the scanty costume vanished simultaneously at nightfall.

A half-dozen of the cast came into the nearest booth without recognizing Ethel, or deliberately avoiding her—she could not tell which—and delightedly began to dissect the morals and artistic abilities of everyone not present until Ollie Van Horn made the forlorn comment:

“Thank God, I’m here! You people would really massacre me!”

“Oh, no, Ollie, we think you’re cute!”

“Thanks,” Ollie said, “and I’m even nicer with my clothes on.”

This drew a mild laugh.

“Well, at least you admit that the male figure is not beautiful.” The voice belonged to Betty Mae Considine. Betty Mae’s harsh, bitter performance as Lear’s daughter Goneril had begun to affect her normal speech. “It just seems sort of summery and natural and uninhibited for you to dress this way, Ollie.”

“I resent that crack about the male figure,” Ollie said. “I am just a ballet dancer at heart.”

“Oh, no, not that!” The answer was so spontaneous, so right, that it seemed to come from all the voices at once.

“And what,” said Ollie with mock innocence, “is wrong with *that*? ”

“*That*, if you must know,” Betty Mac replied, “gives me the cold shivers!”

Van Horn laughed and elaborately lowered his voice. Ethel felt all the more that they knew she was there, listening. “Let us not be catty, girls. Can a man help it if

he finds himself fascinating? I sometimes get tempted, myself, until I look into a cold, cold mirror."

A new voice said: "Personally, I would hate to be around when *he* looks into a mirror. I think the man is unbalanced."

"Please, madame," Ollie groaned. "That's blasphemy! Unbalanced? Loren Clift? Why, that man—that boy has been in perfect balance all his life!"

"Ollie, for heaven's sake, don't *you* start to admire Loren Clift, too. That would make *three* of you. I couldn't stand it!"

"Thrce?"

"Yes, three—himself and yourself and *you know who!*"

There was a long, terrible silence while Ethel Tucker shrank and shrank into the cold leather curve of the booth.

"Now that you mention it, I guess I do know who," Ollie said in a hoarse dismal tone. "Too bad. Somehow it don't seem right that a man should have such pretty legs. It's not fair to us apes!"

"Cheer up, Ollie. Just look around you."

"Nah," Ollie said. "Not for me. I like what I can't have. You gals are too damn available!"

This brought a screaming chorus of protests. The waitress interrupted any more conversation, but the damage was done. Ethel Tucker sat alone and shaken. They couldn't have been so brutal as to do this deliberately! Or could they?

In two weeks' time, without thinking, to be linked this way with a man she scarcely knew—how could they decide so quickly and cruelly what she had not decided for herself, had not even considered?

Loren Clift!

She could have wept, but that crisis would not quite come. There was only a dryness in her throat, a hotness high in her cheeks, a weak inner tremor of anger.

Her immediate impulse was to draw even more closely to Clift, let them talk if they would, but that decision did

not last out a single evening. If the others thought to marry her off on two week's acquaintance, what must the man himself be thinking?

Halfway through that night's rehearsal, during the usual break for Mitch Fallon's notes of criticism, Ethel stood by herself in the pit and awoke lately to the fact that a long graceful pair of arms had encircled her waist. It was impossible that this could have been going on, this intimacy, without her knowing it, yet there the slim hands were, locked carelessly under her breasts, and she had not even noticed the embrace in her preoccupation with the heart and mind of Cordelia. Easy . . . easy . . . easy girl . . . easy mark . . . easy Ethel . . .

She shivered in disgust, with herself not with him, and Clift mistook the motion for pleasure, as he naturally would in his arrogant way, and pulled her back against him, gently shaping his body to her own with the grace of the trained dancer.

She could not break away without appearing awkward and ridiculous, so she let the intimacy go on, and on, and the most terrible thing of all was that no one gave her even a flicker of notice, which meant that they had already accepted her as lost, taken, absorbed, a shadow of a dancing nymph. When she thought of that, she went cold all over and struggled weakly with Clift's hands. Freeing herself, she walked off quickly to a dim corner of the upper terrace and sat down on the cool grass, resting the hot shame of her face against her knees.

Clift followed, stretching beside her, speaking so closely against her ear that his breath ran not hotly but coldly down the curve of her neck, and she shivered again, uncontrollably.

"How you doing?" he said, amiably.

"Loren, listen, I've got to talk to you."

"Have I ever denied you that privilege?"

"Alone."

"This gets better every minute."

"Tonight. Somewhere. I'm serious, Loren."

"That's wonderful. I've been trying to back you into a serious corner for two weeks."

She could see it was not going to be easy. A man like this was not easily hurt. His mind was as unsettled as his feet. He could take a serious idea, bend and shape it like a sculptor, and make a satire of it. Ballet and sculpture were something alike, distortions of life. An emotion that should be simple might become, in his hands, grotesque.

She was afraid of him.

"I'll take you home," he suggested.

"No!" she said, too quickly, remembering that Paul Enright had gone to the cabin for dinner this evening with Glory and had stayed on with her because he was not needed at rehearsal.

"You're awfully shy of the great indoors," Clift noted, lighting himself a cigarette. "Claustrophobia?"

"No," she said shortly, not caring to elaborate. "We can walk somewhere, after the rehearsal, I suppose."

"The park is beautiful at night," he suggested, with a little leap of enthusiasm. "It's over a mile long."

She hesitated. She had never been alone with him, really alone, and there was a kind of wildness about the park that was beautiful by day but haunting by night.

"All right," she said, and added without thinking, "just so we can talk. . . ."

They must have walked a half-mile or more without a word. A path just wide enough for two ran so close to the mountain stream that the water threw up visible sparks where it leaped high enough to catch the thread of light from a few scattered night lamps, which seemed to be there just to keep the park from being an absolute wilderness. The trees were heavy with the green weight of summer, dripping with recent rain. The air was a perfume of many blossoms mingled with the tang of pine, conflicting with the damp, mouldy mist that rose thinly from the ground.

"You were going to talk," Loren Clift reminded, when they had gone to the very limit of the civilized path and must either plunge off into the woods or turn back.

She took a deep breath. "I really came to say good-bye, Loren."

It was the first time she had ever caught him off balance. They had turned around and walked twenty feet or more before he spoke again. "You're not quitting?"

"Not the show," she said.

"Oh." His wits, at least, had lost none of their nimbleness. "Well, you can't say I've made any false moves."

"No, the false moves have been mine."

"In what way?"

"Not thinking, I guess. Letting you be with me so much."

He had to consider that for another hundred feet of casual strolling. "Sometimes it's better when you're not thinking."

"Oh, I agree, but people won't let you, Loren. People make it serious."

"Oh, to hell with people! Is that all?"

►"No, not quite."

"What, then?"

"I don't know how to say it, Loren."

"Say it!" he insisted.

"This—you—us—doesn't mean anything to me. I haven't any feeling."

"I don't know. You look like a girl with feeling," he said harshly.

"I'm afraid I've had it all rubbed off," she said.

"Elsewhere?"

"Yes, elsewhere."

"Tell me."

"No."

They passed a wooden footbridge angling to the left and crossing from one high boulder to another above a narrow, rocky ravine which smashed and twisted and

pounded the mild little mountain stream into a brief roaring cataract. Out on the bridge among the trailing mists from the trees was a shape that might have been a man bent over the railing to listen to the water. They walked a hundred feet farther down the trail before Clift spoke. The roar of the water tumbled musically downstream, and they had to speak on a high level that strained the voice and disturbed the mood.

"Come in here," Clift said.

"In where?"

"This arbour or whatever it is."

She remembered what it was from daytime walks along this path—a series of heavy posts set up to support a vague pattern of wires which now carried a heavy roof of wild flowering vine. At the back of this natural pavilion the mountainside was a solid green wall of manzanita. Along the path a cypress hedge had been encouraged to grow as high as the viny roof, forming a primitive sort of seclusion that was undisguised encouragement to wandering lovers. However, the very obviousness of the place kept it generally deserted at night. It was so long and deep that a single couple would find it hard to feel alone there on a dark night. It had the airy spacelessness of an unexplored cavern.

Convenient, but seldom used, were a row of benches that ran around three sides of the interior. Hikers often rested there in the daytime, but at night, the arbour was only an empty pit.

Clift's hand was shockingly cold on Ethel's wrist. He drew her through a space in the hedge which served as a doorway.

"It's so dark," she protested when he led her toward one of the benches.

"That's right. We've never had it so dark, have we?"

She could hear him feeling the surface of one of the benches.

"It's dry," he said.

She did not sit down, and she sensed that he was also

standing. She felt uneasy. There was an unnatural quality in their hoarse voices and in the absolute darkness, the lack of visual depth, the nothingness. It was not romantic at all.

"If you won't tell me, I'll tell you," Clift said.

"Tell me what."

"About myself."

"Do. I'd like to hear."

"Ethel . . . down where I come from—"

"I know, in Hollywood."

"—I live with a girl."

She was surprised, not by the fact itself but by the abruptness of it. In the complete dark she seemed to lose touch with him. Was he trying to hurt her, or to demonstrate his own peculiar resilience to pain?

"Well," she said, ineffectually. "Well!"

"My God, that sounded almost spinsterish! Are you a spinster, *Miss Tucker*?"

There was a definite insolence in the way he emphasized one word.

The edge of his voice softened. "Come here, Tucker, I didn't mean anything."

"No."

"Come on."

"Loren—"

"Little Miss Tucker." He had found her wrists, but he was not trying to force her. His grip was not even strong enough to hurt; it was strangely light, with that marvellous animal liveliness that distinguished everything he did.

"You've never danced with me," he said.

It was like a dance, the way he held her. She could feel the rhythm swaying through him, though it had not physically touched her. She felt a gentle, irresistible urging, like a leaf at the edge of a whirlwind. She was drawn in and in, up and up, against him, until his subtle movement claimed the awkward resistance of her, made a rhythm of it. They danced together. Together. She could

not stop him, could not stop herself. She was losing and she fought, but the fighting became a part of the dance.

"Billy, Billy. . . ."

She only thought the name, or whispered it, but somehow it came between them, tore them apart, and she found herself alone, empty-handed, shivering hysterically.

Terrified by her own failure, her weakness where she had thought herself strong, she crept back to the bench and sank down with her trembling hands locked in her lap. Loosened strands of her hair tumbled damply down on the bare curve of her shoulders, and she breathed in wretched little gasps of sound.

The terrible part was that Clift did not stop. He seemed to go on and on, not even needing her. She could hear and feel but not quite see the violent motion of him. It was a dance beyond human understanding, a ballet with a theme of naked horror; and she shrank deeper into herself, wanting only to escape, to rush for the gap in the hedge, and run wildly back to the light, the reality she had lost—but she was desperately afraid to move, to leave this tiny little harbour of safety that remained of herself.

The dance ended with sickening abruptness as if the dancer had collapsed exhausted against the ground, but she could not hear the expected violence of his breathing. There was still too much violence churning in herself, forcing her lungs into great heaving sighs.

She waited, slowly recovering calmness, still shivering, but feeling the cold from within give way to the cold from without. The night was damp and unpleasant and fantastically inappropriate for what they had begun.

"Loren."

He did not answer.

"Loren!"

She could not understand the silence. She grubbed frantically in her pockets for a match pack, tore off a paper match with trembling fingers, and then could not bring herself to light it, shocked to an instant of absolute horror at the thought of what she might see.

“Loren, what are you—”

Her own voice came back at her in the strangest of whispers, the sound of complete emptiness, vacancy. One vision of horror gave way to another. The presence of him, in whatever form, could be no worse than this, his absence, his inexplicable phantom absence, as if he had gone dancing off into the high black pit of the universe.

“*Loren!*” It was a scream, not loud, but violent enough to lift her bodily from the bench.

The silence was complete. She knew that she was utterly alone, and she ran through the hedge with the senseless terror of a rabbit and passed without any memory of the passage from the awful dark of the park into the lighted street of the town, where she found herself some indefinite time later, huddled on a lonely bench outside the fire station.

PART FOUR

I

POLICE OFFICER WILLARD PRUITT HAD MADE HIS NIGHTLY inspection of the Citizen's State Bank. He crossed Main Street and followed the steep downward slant of the sidewalk into the town square, where a highway cloverleaf neatly distributed traffic. He was opposite the City Hall when he saw the girl on the bench. The big door of the fire station was closed. There was a light on the second floor where the night firemen were quartered. It was five minutes short of midnight. The shops were very dimly lighted. A tremendous semi-trailer van roared through the town, leaving behind it a vast restless depth of silence.

Officer Pruitt was not experienced with vagrancy. There were old men in the daytime who made themselves a minor nuisance in the park, but this was night-time, and in all his ten years on the force Pruitt could not remember a woman idling on a darkened city street.

He continued around the square, which was actually more like a diamond, diagonally bisected by the highway, never losing sight of his lone companion. His leather boot heels beat emphatically on the pavement, the sound preceding him, warning the town to be good, to sleep well, let the law be alert. Cascade City had a good safety record, day and night. Pruitt shared that record, and so his boot strokes rang out with confidence.

He was a full ten minutes testing doors, spotlighting the darker of the stores, before he completed the circuit and approached the lone girl on the bench. He had a question shaping in his mind, something about the

weather, the chill of the night, leading into the odd circumstance of a lone girl on an empty street, but the light sifting past his shoulder palely described her face, and Pruitt recognized her. Not by name. She was one of a group, the Shakespearian actors. He passed them every night of the week in shuffled combinations, and came to know them by manner, by a certain foreign quality of behaviour. The town expected the actors to be strange, to be loud, even to be a little bit lawless if they chose. It was an odd sort of tolerance which did not apply to the native-born youth. If she had been a beautiful local girl, downtown, alone at midnight, he might have questioned her, but a beautiful abandoned actress was a theatrical contrivance, for the town's amusement, and Pruitt passed on with a mere nod and a glance down the whiteness of her face, the pulsing line of her throat, into the shadow of her breasts.

It could not be said that all of Pruitt's thoughts were within the prescribed limits of the law. If the wind had changed direction just enough to push him, he, Pruitt, might have clamped his big hands on her wrists and carried her off into the park. She was that beautiful, that pale, that helpless before him, and what difference between the law and the lawless but a breath of wind? Pruitt walked on because he was ambitious, a good cop, and not just a man who obeyed the winds, but he breathed more heavily, and his heel-beat was not as rhythmic as before. . . .

Pruitt lived by the clock. He drank two nightly cups of coffee, one at 4.00 a.m., "the pick-up," and one at 12.15, which he privately called the "mixer," for there were always sociable night casuals at this hour, friendly and impressed by his uniform. From midnight to dawn Officer Pruitt stood unchallenged as the most important man in town. . . .

He shared the coffee counter with one other man, whom he recognized as an actor not by looks but by association. This one was a dark chap with a lot of solid

bone in his face, shoulders that were not objectionably square, not upholstered like a comic strip hero's. Pruitt had his own opinions about how some of these swashbuckling actors would behave in a real fight, but this one would do all right. He was not big, but he had the strength-lines and the work-lines in his face.

Pruitt considered speaking, but the actor gave him no encouragement. The door breezed open and another actor came in, a slouching young man in sweat shirt and blue jeans. He walked up to his friend and slapped him on the shoulder. "Hey, Edgar, I mean Anthony! How's everything at Stratford-on-Avon?"

The one at the counter must be the English actor, Pruitt noted. There had been an article in the paper about him.

Anthony Riordan turned on the stool, smiling. "In London we call it Stratford-on-Cascade. . . . Just call me 'Tony,' if you will, Van Horn. I prefer that to Anthony."

"I agree. You would never look right with Cleopatra," Ollie Van Horn said. He picked up a toothpick and began nibbling the end of it. Wandering over to the juke-box, he scanned the list of records, glanced at the big clock on the wall, and asked: "Has Tucker been in here, Tony?"

"Ethel Tucker?"

"Dame Tucker, if you like. Whatever you call her, that's my girl!"

"Your girl?" The Englishman looked doubtful and only faintly amused.

"Somebody's girl," Van Horn said, grudgingly. "Anyway, I got a car going her way."

"She hasn't been here in the past half-hour."

"You couldn't have overlooked her?" Ollie persisted. "This is where she usually comes."

"No," Tony Riordan said, smiling again. "I could not have overlooked her."

Ollie grinned. "I guess not. Well—too bad. It's a long

walk home even if our friend, Mr. Nijinsky, carries her on his shoulders."

"She might have gone home ahead of you, Ollie."

"Not unless she beat a trail through the woods. We just came from the cabin, looking for her along the way."

Riordan glanced at the clock and frowned.

Van Horn interpreted the look in his own light-hearted way: "She'll turn up. 'Night—Riordan."

"Good night, Ollie."

The younger man was gone, running, and Officer Pruitt, making a cannily swift decision, waited to blow carefully on his coffee before speaking:

"Is the missing girl a blonde?"

The dark young man with the British accent slowly examined the policeman's round face. Pruitt had shoved back the official cap and his brown hair stood up stiffly. The squinting eyes and the deep red weathering of his cheeks suggested a man facing perpetually into a cold north wind.

Riordan nodded. "Yes, the girl is blonde, but I would not say she is missing." His tone was slightly ironical. "There will undoubtedly be an escort with her."

"An escort?" Pruitt blew thoughtfully across a spoonful of coffee, then sampled it with his tongue. "A boy friend? No, sir. Not when I saw her."

Riordan's eyes brightened with interest. "Do you know Ethel Tucker?"

"Maybe. On the tall side. Tall and trim. Yellow dress, open throat, short sleeves—"

"That's the one. Where—"

"On the firehouse bench. All by herself."

Riordan made a half-hearted movement toward the door as if to hail Van Horn's car, which was already turning south into Main Street. He came slowly back to the counter, rubbing his jaw. "Odd hour for a girl to be alone."

"Might be waiting for a ride," Pruitt suggested.

"At the fire station?"

Pruitt smiled. "Maybe she favours fire trucks."

Riordan's laugh was half-hearted. "She's no fire-bug, if that's what you mean."

"I hope not!" Pruitt said solemnly. "We thought we had one of those a few years back. Fire seemed to take a liking for the lumber industry. Nothing ever come of it, though. Personally, I'll take my criminals straight. No bugs for me, fire or otherwise!"

Riordan folded his paper and paid his cheque, constraining an uneasy curiosity. "Well, I guess it's no business of mine."

Pruitt swallowed his coffee and rapped a knuckle sharply on the counter. "It could be business of mine."

The two men left the restaurant together. Riordan matched strides with the policeman until they had turned into Main Street and were passing under the hotel marquee. He made a gesture as if to turn aside, but something in the officer's determined manner persuaded him to keep pace.

At the top of the long dip in Main Street they could see the bench and the girl. She was huddled forward with her arms pressed deep in her lap, face obscured in the windy tangle of her hair. Riordan thought of a little lost girl wistfully trailing her rag doll between her knees. As they moved ahead, the illusion faded. There was no rag doll. There was more of tense expectancy than of loss; he was sure of that when she sprang up violently at the sound of his voice.

There was a motion of the hands as if to take his own before her eyes fully identified him. His friendliness brought no response, only a nervous backward motion. He mentioned Ollie Van Horn, and it seemed to take the girl a moment to orient herself. . . . Oh, yes, she said finally, it was quite late, and Glory must be worried about her. . . . He remembered Glory as the red-headed girl who had chosen Ethel Tucker for a cabin-mate.

Riordan introduced Officer Pruitt, and Pruitt said:

"Saw you on my midnight round, Miss, and I figured maybe you lost somebody—"

"Midnight!" Her voice was almost inaudible. She glanced swiftly over her shoulder.

"That was a half-hour ago, Miss," Pruitt reminded.

She closed the collar of her dress with her pale hands as if the discovery of midnight increased the chill which pressed about her. "He'll surely come," she said in a whisper.

"Who was you waiting for, Miss?"

"One of the boys... from the theatre."

"Which one?" Riordan asked, though he knew the answer well enough. For two weeks now the affair had amounted to a monopoly.

"Loren Clift."

Riordan was angry. Clift was just the type to keep a girl waiting for him at the midnight hour. "Were you to meet him here?"

"Oh, no," she said, nervously, hesitating, and then her fright gave way to a kind of hysteria. Her cheeks were suddenly streaming, and her lips worked without releasing a sound. The two men managed to get her to sit down on the bench, each one holding one of her hands. Pruitt was thinking, this is for me, after all, and Riordan was shocked by the cold contact of her hand with his. He held the girl's fingers gently as if they might snap off like icicles in his grasp.

Pruitt tried to fit together the little incoherent fragments of her story... boy and girl, rendezvous in the park. Pruitt knew the place, that arbour of mouldy vines up at the head of the falls. Dark as hell. Only one thing the dark like that was good for—

Pruitt observed that she seemed less frightened after that first emotional outburst. Shyness was returning with the warm blood that he could feel in her hand.

"Mr. Riordan," he said, "why don't you run down that other boy with the car and tak' this girl home?"

Riordan's scowling eyes met the policeman's above

Ethel Tucker's head. "Run him down? In a car? I'm afraid I left my seven-league boots at home."

Pruitt made a gesture with his shoulder, and Riordan understood that the girl would say no more in his own presence. He was a friend, and her story was not for friends. Whatever had happened to her, it involved as much of shame as it did of fear.

Riordan reluctantly put the soft hand back into the girl's lap. "All right. I'll get a car somewhere . . ."

Officer Pruitt found himself in possession of one female hand, all by himself, and he could just picture the chief, or the mayor, or anybody else riding by at this hour, and what they would say, so he carefully put her hand with the other one. He stood up, spreading his shoulders, and planted one foot on the bench. "All right now—tell me, Miss, what happened? You don't have to worry about the wrong story getting around. This is just for me, the police."

The officer's own gruff brand of shyness produced the right response in the girl. She told him how it had been in the arbour, the boy Loren Clift, right there within the reach of her hand, talking, friendly, no anger, and first silence then nothing. Nothing at all.

Was she sure there had been no hurt feelings? . . . Not there in the arbour, she insisted. Ten minutes earlier she may have hurt him a little, when she told him this was the end of their friendship, but Loren Clift was not the type to be hurt deeply, and in the arbour there was no argument at all. He was not angry. He was dancing.

Pruitt's foot dropped away from the bench and came down resoundingly on the pavement. He drew back, looking severely at the girl.

Dancing?

Ethel Tucker had recovered enough to laugh nervously at the policeman's bewilderment. Not knowing Loren Clift, he could not understand. Loren did not need music to dance. The music was inside him.

"Well, that beats me!" Pruitt admitted. "You tell the boy off, and he starts dancing."

"I could not see him, but I knew he was dancing. I could hear him."

"And then"—Pruitt snapped his fingers—"gone!"

She shivered. "I was so scared, I just ran. I had never felt so suddenly alone—absolutely alone—in my life! Out here on the street, I had to act sane again. I had to wait for him. Do you suppose he could still be in the park, looking for me?"

Pruitt was baffled. He had never heard anything quite like this before. He was relieved when an open sedan swooped down the hill, spun through the intricate clover-leaf, reversing its course, and slid to a halt before the fire station. Tony Riordan was alone in the rear seat. A tall good-looking blond boy sat at the wheel with a red-headed girl beside him and the one called Ollie on her right, leaning over the door: "Hey, Tucker, we didn't know you were a volunteer fire-lady!"

Riordan leaped to the sidewalk. Ethel Tucker needed very little persuasion to get into the rear seat of the car with Van Horn. Pruitt, omitting details, explained that she had lost a boy friend, and Ollie offered to drop by Loren Clift's apartment after taking the girls home.

"Well," Anthony Riordan said, when the car roared away, "I guess that takes care of one of your little night duties, Inspector."

"That's not the end of this," Pruitt said, brusquely. "This one is just beginning."

Riordan, aroused by the official earnestness of the tone, decided to go along with Pruitt. They paid a visit to the darkened Shakespearian theatre, where they roused a young actor who slept on a rotting mattress backstage, substituting his service as night watchman in lieu of room rent. He had seen nothing of Loren Clift since last evening's rehearsal.

Pruitt produced a flashlight from his pocket and plunged down the knoll from the theatre directly into the

park, hiking rapidly along the central path, playing his light in a broad semicircle. The park lay at the bottom of a ravine. It would have been difficult for anyone to avoid Pruitt's light without climbing one of the exit paths to the streets above.

Pruitt turned into the ivy arbour and gave it a quick survey. Riordan could no longer contain his curiosity. Pruitt answered his query by telling part, not all, of Ethel Tucker's story. "A funny business, Mr. Riordan. If a man was leaving a girl cold he would want her to know she was being left, wouldn't he?"

"Definitely. Spite is a waste of time if your victim is not aware of it."

They left the arbour and strolled over to the nearest footbridge. The beam of light danced brilliantly on the rushing, tumbling water.

"Do people ever fall in?" Riordan suggested.

"It can happen, but it's only waist-deep."

"A man might be ashamed to come slinking back to his girl like a wet dog."

"That's an idea," Pruitt agreed. "First thing I've heard tonight that makes any sense."

They decided to wait for Ollie Van Horn's report. Returning through the park they followed the stream bed as well as possible, single file, stumbling along in the feeble light, at intervals examining the water, which plunged on its icy interminable way, revealing nothing but sheer depth and power, vanishing at last into a dark tube that passed beneath the city's streets.

"Main Street Bridge," Pruitt said and turned back to the plaza.

Van Horn's convertible was waiting by the fire station. The owner had changed places at the wheel with his friend, Paul Enright. The girls had been left at home. "Sorry—our friend Clift is not home," Van Horn said. "We phoned a few people and got ourselves sworn at. If we're gonna wake people up, why can't it be for somebody popular?"

Pruitt tapped a leather heel thoughtfully on the pavement. His big red face was dark and hard in the dim light. "This Clift was not a very likeable chap?" he enquired.

"I admire him—admire him greatly," Van Horn said. "Admiration not to be confused with love. He's a great little toe-dancer."

"Dancer, huh? Well, a man can't just dance out of a woman's life and into nowhere, not in my town, nor anywhere else. Men, I think we've got ourselves a busy night ahead."

2

Officer Pruitt, aroused, was a man of considerable action. By 1.45 a.m. he had received a negative report from every one of Loren Clift's known acquaintances. At 2.00 a.m. he phoned his chief: "John, one of the Shakespearian actors is missing without cause."

The reply, a drowsy blur, sounded to Pruitt like: "That might be an improvement."

"I'm organizing a small leg-hunt, John. He was last seen in the park, so we'll work the stream in case of an accidental fall."

The chief swore, reminding Pruitt that the stream joined with other streams and flowed eventually into the Pacific Ocean.

It was not likely, Pruitt thought, that a body would float that far.

"Let's not start with a body, Willard, not until we really have one," the chief cautioned. "I'll be down personally to prevent that from happening."

Pruitt hung up, wondering if the chief meant that he, Pruitt, could not organize a manhunt without risking additional lives in the process. The chief, of course, was very unhappy. Nothing should ever happen in Cascade City after midnight.

At 4.00 a.m. Mitchell Fallon, a miserable, unshaven spectre of a man in saggy silk pajamas, was pouring coffee for his two fellow-directors. Dan Whitaker, hastily dressed in a sweat shirt and shapeless trousers, was slumped in a corner of Fallon's breakfast nook, his head resting in the crook of his arm, gaunt and ugly in sleep, though he was not normally an ugly man. His thin, asthmatic snores interrupted the opinion of John Pomeroy, who was contrastingly alert, shaved, and cleanly dressed in a light sports jacket. One of Pomeroy's favourite boasts was that he often wrestled with sleep but never let it overcome him.

"The girl, of course, is responsible for this nonsense," Pomeroy declared. "Clift has an absurd streak in him—you must have noticed that. If a girl turned him down he would do something absurd."

"What do you mean, 'turned him down'?" Mitchell Fallon said, grumpily, inhaling the steam from his coffee.

Pomeroy smiled. "A girl goes into the park in the company of a boy like Clift with one of three possible attitudes—eagerness, reluctance, or repulsion. Let's say this girl was reluctant."

"I don't like that idea, John. If your version gets around, my Cordelia is going to be badly hurt. She's really a nice girl. I can't afford to lose that quality of niceness. A lost Fool is serious enough. A lost Cordelia means ruin!"

Pomeroy chuckled at Fallon's habitual pessimism.

Fallon addressed himself in the general direction of the heavens. "I had a foreboding that this season would find me hanging by the tail of the tiger. Well, here we go boys—tiger, tiger!"

"Say!" Dan Whitaker roused suddenly from his recumbent attitude, knuckling the red-veined depths of his eyes, blinking at the other men. "I've been thinking."

"You've been sleeping!" Fallon said, reprovingly.

Whitaker yawned. "A mere superstition, Mitch. The man may sleep, but not his mind. I woke with a brilliant thought. I shall proceed from there."

Fallon pushed a cup of coffee across the table. "What thought?"

"If Loren Clift left the girl of his choice so precipitously he must have been impelled by violence. Now violence often springs from within the man himself, but sometimes, I'm afraid, it also springs from without. Let the police scout for the boy. We three tired old men shall apprehend the nature of the violence."

At 9.00 a.m. Chief of Police John Searcy phoned the county sheriff: "... This has already gone beyond the city limits, Lew. We've covered every respectable corner of town. ... Yeah, a few of the others, too. It's not likely the boy has been shacking out somewhere. He spends all his time with one gal, and she's the one who lost track of him last night. ... Yeah, it's almost fishy enough to be true, and she won't change a word. ... No, she shows no physical marks of violence. As far as we've looked, that is. Heh, heh. Bad case of nerves, she has, though. ... Yeah, yeah, that could be. It could account for the boy skipping town. I gather he was a sort of a fruit-cake, anyway. A genius type, according to Mitchell Fallon, and you know what they are! Gawd, I got a whole crew of them out here beating the hills. I don't think we'll need any of your men, except to scout the river north of town. ... Well, I'll go back to work on the girl, but you know, Lew, the last thing a woman will admit—"

Ethel Tucker lay on a soft wool blanket behind the cabin, letting the sun burn into her, smelling the hot sap of the pines. In blue jeans and open-throated shirt, hair tucked under a bandanna, chewing a long blade of grass, she looked like a gangling, car-free boy.

She stared at the sky until her eyes smarted, because

only wideawake could she control her thoughts. The drowsy dark of sleep persisted in becoming the dark of the arbour again, and when the wind stirred a leaf, it was like the rustle of dancing feet. If she once let her muscles relax, if she gave herself up to a luxury of lazy, sensual motion, to the warm embrace of the sunlight, she might be losing what she had spent the long hours of the night trying to regain, her sense of balance, her innate feeling for rightness and wrongness.

Worst of all, she had only a half-desire to resist the urgent memory. She could gently close her eyes and take up again where the night had left her, abandoned, thwarted, on the verge of discovery....

Was she in love with Loren Clift? . . .

He was not like Billy Lewiston, not in the least. Billy was so completely male, so right about everything he did. Loren was not truly male at all. He was like some undiscovered part of herself inviting her to step beyond the bounds of good sense into a spaceless world of release, a kind of romantic non-existence. . . . She had never so much as kissed Loren Clift in all her strange experience with him. She felt a little tug of terror at the thought of what it might have been last night to go that far with him, farther. Where would those weightless feet have carried her? Where had they carried him?

She sat up suddenly, leaning a bare elbow on the ground, and a sharp rock pressed through the blanket into her flesh, hurting her to the bone, but she drove down hard against the pain, setting her teeth against it, refusing to shift her weight. No, Loren was not like Billy Lewiston. When Billy was gone she had shared a little kind of death with him. There was no shattering sense of loss with Loren, only the shock of having glanced, too swiftly, over the dark edge of the unknown. Complete horror might be as enthralling as the climax of passion, but this mysterious half-horror left her weak in body, restless in spirit. . . .

She heard a step on the far side of the cabin, and her heart beat crazily. Who would be there? Who did she

want it to be? Did she want him back? Loren! She found her hand extended stiffly at the end of her arm, an impulsive gesture without meaning, for the fingers neither pushed nor pulled, they merely drifted in space.

A man came around the corner, and the breath she had been holding came out swiftly, letting her shoulders fall in a deep, visible sigh.

The tall loose-jointed figure wore boyish clothes, but this was no boy. This was Billy Lewiston's sort of man, grown up, full-grown.

A pipe dragged from the corner of Dan Whitaker's mouth. He took the pipe out, grinned shyly, scratched the back of his hatless brown head, and gestured off toward the slope of the mountain to indicate the route of his coming. "You observe, Miss Tucker, the antithesis of the outdoor man. I am absolutely futile in the woods. Poison ivy crawls right up my pants-legs. Manzanita impales me. The rattlesnakes have a system of signals to call out their whole clan as soon as I set my clumsy feet on native soil. Wasps mistake my head for a rotten stump. If there were grizzly bears, I would trip over their lazy rumps. In fact, by moving slightly to your left you may detect the flight of buzzards which has been hovering in my wake all morning!"

"You're the last person I expected to see, Mr. Whitaker."

"I admit I am not exactly a maiden's choice to come calling—"

"I think you're just right, Mr. Whitaker. If I had to make a choice right now—" She blushed, surprised at herself.

"Go on, flatter me. At my age I can use it." Whitaker dropped awkwardly on the corner of the blanket. "You, my dear, are supposed to be in a state of shock."

"Thanks for telling me. Now I know how it feels."

"How does it feel?"

"I don't know."

"That makes sense. This is the most enlightening

conversation I've had all morning." Whitaker grinned and took a deep draught on his pipe.

"I can't decide what I feel about Loren Clift," Ethel Tucker said and then bit her lip, regretting the revelation.

Whitaker nodded. "I agree, it's hard to sympathize with a phantom. . . . Miss Tucker, you were there. The only witness, as far as we know. Was there any evidence of violence, anything you have not thought to mention?"

She turned fully into the sun to face him, frowning prettily. "Violence?"

"Is that surprising? I find it logical, the way I've heard the story. What have I missed? What was the—er—situation just before Loren Clift left you? Don't leave any gaps for people to fill with their own unsavoury imaginations. You'll come off better with the truth."

She squared her shoulders. "This is true—he was dancing."

"All by himself?"

"I know it sounds ridiculous."

"Not to me."

"Loren did not need me to dance."

"Complete unto himself," Whitaker said, looking off toward the green slant of the mountain, vanishing in a lofty haze. "He was both partners in the dance, lover and beloved. You know, Ethel, it was not a bad time for Loren Clift to go. If a man reaches completeness in himself, what else can he get out of life?"

She shuddered, and her arms hugged tightly across her breast. "You make that sound very final, Mr. Whitaker."

"Motive, motive, motive," Whitaker said angrily, kicking at the ground with the worn toe of his shoe. "Doesn't anyone recognize the complete absence of motivation for this thing? The boy must have taken off in a flight of lunacy, or he was taken off by other powers beyond his control. Either way, the thing lacks reason. Are you sure you do not hold the answer, Ethel, without knowing it? What were the last things you said to each other?"

She glanced at his sharp, serious face and shut her eyes in concentration. Finally: "He was teasing me," she said.

"Teasing?"

"He told me he was living with a girl in Hollywood. Just like that. I think he wanted to shock me."

"Were you shocked?"

"I stammered a little, and he called me a spinster."

"Oh?"

"Then he was sorry, and he began to—he began—"

"To dance?"

"Yes."

"Could you see him?"

"No."

"What did you hear? Was it like a ballet, or was it more violent?"

"How do you mean?"

"Like a scuffle?"

"Scuffle?" She pressed her hands over her ears as if to reject the sound they heard. Her lips twisted into a small unhappy line like a red teardrop. One red tear. "Oh, Mr. Whitaker. I don't know. I wish I could tell you. I was a little sick, or I might have heard better."

"Sick?"

"Inside. He sickened me, or I sickened myself."

"He was physically repulsive?"

"No, mentally. The sickness was in his mind—or mine. Oh, I can't say any more, I can't!"

Whitaker turned away, breathing heavily. He had not meant to be such an inquisitor. "Don't say more. That's it. I know now that Clift was in no mood to run away and sulk. Suicide is fantastic for a man of his stripe. That would be like striking down his only God. He was prankish, yes, but what kind of a prank is this? Where would he go without even a change of clothing? He was not tough enough to strike off into the hills. He was civilized, right down to his fingernails. There's only one

answer. He did not run away, he did not dance into space, he was taken!"

She looked at him with wide blue eyes. "Where?"

Whitaker spread his arms to the four winds, and there was a true note of sorrow in his tone: "God only knows!"

Anthony Riordan stumbled down the long rib of the mountain. Dust sifted uncomfortably through his socks, burning his tired feet. He swung a club at a tangle of scrub, beating his way through, filling his nostrils with the live dust, sneezing violently. His rapid plunge ended at a sheer lip of red shale breaking steeply away to reveal the whole valley. Far at his left the horizon was dominated by the bowl of the Shakespearian theatre, flying its colourful pennants, and by the six-story yellow stone tower of the hotel, a long rectangular structure dominating the central block of the town. Below him Cascade City was a colourful panorama of roofs, slanting this way and that, pouring over the hills and into the central valley, where the main highway and its traffic ran like a silver river. The true river, the main artery of this valley, was beyond the town, sunk too deeply in the earth to be seen from here.

Riordan sat on a rock. Down on the nearest road he could see Willard Pruitt's police car. Pruitt was somewhere between, threshing through the brush, more interested in preserving his amateur scouts than in finding a lost man.

Goose chase, thought Riordan. Pursuit of the wild goose. Why should I be trying to rescue a man I have no wish to see again? Loyalty? To what? Man to man? Actor to actor?

Riordan shrugged and lit himself a cigarette, which probably was against the fire laws, but he felt decidedly lawless today, angry at nothing. He had felt this same futile anger during the war. Surely a half-dozen men sitting at a table, by a process of pure reason, could have come closer to finding Loren Clift than this amateurish

team of bushwhackers. So might the problems of all men eventually be solved, while armies swarmed against each other like disconcerted ants.

Pruitt, the night officer, had started the hunt, but he had kept it within reasonable bounds, searching the upper and lower cascades for a possible drowning. Then higher levels of authority took over, and the whole thing became confused. A child might vanish into the hills, but Loren Clift was no child. A man could be murdered but why dragged into the woods? A woman, yes, but why a man? To hide the body? It would take a more expert search than this to disclose a carefully concealed crime.

Was there something more horrid beneath the surface of this matter than the unsophisticated could comprehend?"

With the thought, Riordan turned his eyes down into the valley and found the red tarpaper roof of a little hilltop cabin where Ethel Tucker lived with her friend Glory. Above the cabin he noticed a large city reservoir encircled by a high steel fence.

Ethel Tucker—tall, fine, lovely, virginal—if he had been there in the arbour with her, would he be gone now like Loren Clift?

Arresting thought. Riordan stood up and flexed the knuckles of his hands. Some quirk in his character found the idea attractive. Was Ethel Tucker physically involved in the disappearance of Clift? Whatever her relation to this, it could not be brutal or savage. She was not savage.

Or was she?

For the first time since he had seen her face in a restaurant mirror Riordan felt more than a casual male interest. He suddenly continued his progress down the hill, but this time there was a strong, urgent purpose in his stride. . . .

A mile away from Riordan, by the upper tributaries of Cascade Creek, one of the searchers was kneeling beside the rushing water, a dark tireless man. Apparently he was

drinking with the cup of his large hand, but he gave to the stream more than he took from it. A tremendous flow of generosity poured from his full heart into the pure water. His hand twisted in the silvery stream, stroked it like the delicate strands of a woman's hair.

3

The story of the vanishing dancer, which had been vocal-ly circulating all day, broke into print in the middle of the afternoon. The local paper gave it a full banner headline.

At 5.00 p.m. Chief Searcy was dismayed to find his office in the City Hall jammed with curious citizens. When the sheriff arrived for consultation Searcy adjourned to the chambers of the city council. Officer Pruitt, wielding a strong right arm, managed to eliminate all persons of uncertain connection with the case. The result was a session of twelve variously earnest men surrounding the big council table, including the three Shakespearian directors.

The chief used a small hairy fist for a gavel. "Gentlemen, I may as well say at the start that this case beats anything in my memory. We are not an inquest. I would like to throw the whole thing on the table as it stands and get a few ideas."

The chief was a little man with a long head and a bull neck. All his strength seemed to have piled in great knots at the curve of his shoulders. The rest of him was ordinary, almost slight. His eyes were small and black in his muscular face. His ill-humoured manner covered a dry and unexpected wit.

Searcy recited the evidence to date: Loren Clift had disappeared from the upper park area between eleven and midnight. Nothing had been removed from his living quarters. His landlady was certain he had not returned home since late the previous afternoon.

"Incidentally, Stell Donahue has cleared up one point. We thought this Clift boy, who seems to have a way with women, might be keeping a second room somewhere for private—er—enterprises, but Stell says he never stayed away all night before, though he often was late getting in."

The mayor, a tall elderly gentleman with gold-rimmed glasses and handsome white hair, wanted to know the reason for the manhunt, which was causing a lot of wild rumours.

Officer Willard Pruitt spoke up, defensively: "There was no sign Clift came back to town. Only other ways a man could go from the park would be downstream, or straight up into the hills. The sheriff's men covered the river. We covered the hills."

"Exactly!" the mayor coughed with dignity behind his hand. "Either way strikes me as the choice of an escaping criminal, not of a normal young man. Was there any evidence of a crime?"

The question brought a general uneasy exchange of glances. "We thought of that," the chief said. "There were no reported thefts. The most likely crime would be right there in the park, but we can't break the girl's story on that. He didn't leave her harmed, he just left her—abandoned."

The mayor removed his glasses and wiped his watery eyes with a silk handkerchief. "Have you called in a doctor for verification?"

Chief Searcy snorted unhappily. "This is a grown woman, Arthur, not a schoolgirl. Another thing, Arthur, you've just called the boy 'a normal young man,' and that I'm not so sure of. All reports give me an impression he was slightly on the balmy side. He might have worked up to quite a state of excitement. I don't know what frustration would do to a boy of his age, but I know it has done some queer things to a lot of older boys."

There was a general laugh. "Your knowledge comes from hearsay, I trust," said the mayor.

"No comment."

The county sheriff, youngest man in the group except Willard Pruitt, leaned auspiciously into the discussion. He was a handsome, ruddy, athletic blond with the hearty assurance of a professional politician. "It seems to me that this whole mystery is based on the eye-witness report of one girl."

"Ear witness," the chief said.

Sheriff Connealy shrugged. "I like to tackle a problem at its weakest point. The hills and the river seem so unlikely that I am forced to fall back on the girl again. Is she reliable?"

Mitchell Fallon had been a restless listener, nibbling the quick flesh of his tapering fingertips. He spoke sharply: "I'll vouch for her without qualification. Fine family, best references. She's the most serious actress I have had in years. Above all, she is highly intelligent. I admit she has been rather annoyingly attached to Loren Clift, but I question whether the chief attachment was hers or his. Her general behaviour is above reproach."

The chief looked down the long bony ridge of his nose at the small knot of his hands. "Sorry, Mitchell, but I have evidence to the contrary."

"*What?*" Fallon was astounded.

All of the directors stirred with interest.

"I would rather have withheld this information, but I assume our discussion will not go beyond this room."

There were nods of agreement. The chief glanced sharply at the city editor of the local paper, a newcomer in town, an aggressive outlander who had no particular reputation for discretion. The editor smiled. "I am here as an interested citizen only," he assured them.

"Well, this Tucker girl lives at the Morgan cabin, don't she?" the chief went on. "Well, I had a complaint last week from old lady McCall, who lives down the hill from the cabin. At the time I told her that gossip was outside my authority. Seems she didn't like the carryings-on up at the Morgan place. Every other night or so a fella and a girl would go up there, which was all right with

Mrs. McCall except that the lights went on in the damnedest places or they didn't go on at all, and the fella never left until around midnight."

Mitchell Fallon had shrunk, apparently, to half his size in the big formal council chair. "B-b-but how—" he sputtered, appealing helplessly to his fellow-directors.

John Pomeroy, more amused than troubled, came to Fallon's rescue. "Cordelia—that is, Ethel Tucker—works with me every other night in *King Lear*. I recall that she spends most of her free evenings in the audience. Loren Clift has a full schedule every night. Your friend Mrs. McCall must be mistaken."

There seemed, subtly, to be a conflict growing in the council room, with sides obviously drawn—the theatre versus the town, the invading libertines versus entrenched respectability. Mitchell Fallon, who was both a townsman and an actor, turned visibly grey with repressed anger and confusion.

"Mrs. McCall was mighty positive," the chief drawled. "I got an idea from her statement that she keeps a pair o' field glasses for these neighbourly emergencies. She even knew the boy was a blond, which would be quite a trick o' the eye, at night, from a quarter-mile away!"

There was a violent stir of protest. "Loren Clift is no blond!" Fallon blustered.

The chief glanced uncomfortably at Officer Pruitt. "Where did I get the idea the boy was blond, Willard?"

"Radio report said a brunett," the sheriff interceded.

"I sent that," Pruitt said. He looked at his chief with a trace of annoyance. "The *gir'l* is blonde, Chief, not the *boy*!"

Chief Scary quickly recovered his wits. "Shows how a man can cross up his facts. Mrs. McCall plants this blond fella in my mind, and right off I figure the missing boy is a blond. Damn! That reminds me—the girl Mrs. McCall described was no blonde either, she was a redhead!"

Mitchell Fallon groaned, and all eyes came his way. Bowed against his hands, the director rocked in his chair

like a man who had just been struck in the face. "Kids—fool kids," he murmured, almost inaudibly.

When it became evident that Fallon would say no more John Pomeroy supplied the names of Glory Roberts, the redhead, and Paul Enright, the blond. As an afterthought he recalled that Miss Roberts wore a diamond engagement ring.

"Mrs. McCall did not report the diamond. Her glasses were not likely that powerful." Chief Searcy, with a show of good nature, hammered his fist again on the table: "Gentlemen, I'm for closing the case of McCall versus Shakespeare. This is not an investigation of back-fence morals. Mr. Fallon, they're your babies, and I don't say as I envy you."

Fallon's face came up with a crooked smile. "Thanks, John. I have never tried to emphasize good behaviour, only good theatre, but Lord, I thought Roberts and Enright were the most sensible pair of the lot!" Fallon sighed deeply, wiped sweat from his brow, and seemed then to recover his composure. "Frankly, I don't see what all this has to do with the disappearance of Loren Clift."

The third of the directors, Dan Whitaker, had remained, throughout the discussion, draped like a discarded bathrobe across the arm of his chair, showing life at intervals only by the shifting clench of his teeth on the long stem of his pipe. Without a change of expression, except to remove the pipe from his mouth, Whitaker spoke: "Gentlemen, I admire your restraint, but your obtuseness leaves me cold. Why does every one of you deliberately avoid the interpretation, the very word that springs instantly to the average mind when a man has vanished without trace? You've been avoiding it all day, all of you, even the press, which I find as a newspaper man not only amazing but downright un-American!"

"Let's say there are two words, not one, which spring to mind, but they are so closely linked in the catalogue of horrors we may regard them as one. The words, of course, are 'kidnapping' and 'murder.' "

Whitaker had his audience now, every man in the room. "Of course you have all thought of murder, but why so shy of the subject? We can't rule out accident, but accident rarely takes pains to dispose of its victims so cleanly. I can even swallow Chief Searcy's theory of a burst of insanity, but madness must have its motive, and the normal resistance of one girl to the romantic assault of one egocentric young man seems the flimsiest possible excuse for a brainstorm."

"I am shy of the murder idea because it could ruin the whole season for us," Mitch Fallon confessed.

Whitaker chuckled. "Mitch, you should rip that word 'ruin' out of your dictionary. Nothing can ruin us but a bad performance. As a matter of fact this might be good publicity."

"Now, Dan, don't let the newspaper instinct mislead you. We have never relied on that kind of publicity," Fallon countered. "When we lower our standards to the cheapest level I predict we will die as fast as we have grown."

Whitaker agreed with a nod. "I'll grant you that, Mitch, but I still think the evidence favours murder. Here's the evidence as I see it—" Whitaker rapped his pipe on his palm for emphasis: "Loren Clift failed to respond when the girl spoke his name. Why? The logical assumption is that he was unable to respond. His voice, then, must have been choked off at the source. Choking involves an audible process, unless it is immediate and violent, the result of outside pressure. . . . Secondly, the sound of Clift's dancing could very easily have been confused with the sound of a man struggling. In that darkness, she might hear what her imagination told her to hear—but *note!*" Whitaker looked about him with a glare of triumph: "All of the sounds that Ethel Tucker heard were *inside* the arbour. She grew frightened and ran out, which suggests to me that Clift himself did not leave the arbour until *after* the girl was gone. Again, his silence without cause fails to make sense unless he fainted

away and awakened only after she left, but if so where is he now? The evidence to me indicates that Clift was held there in a strangling grip until Ethel Tucker was gone. . . . Third—and this is most important, gentlemen—is the motive. All of you, except the sheriff, have seen Ethel Tucker in person. I ask you—can you think of any criminal impulse to lead a man away from a motive like that? No! The impulse would be either direct assault upon the girl herself or assault upon the man who exclusively claimed her affections. The girl was not attacked. The man was. There is your motive—and my advice is, when you find Loren Clift, don't be shocked if you find him dead!"

Whitaker rammed the pipe into his mouth and bit so hard on the stem that he could feel it crunching. He crossed his arms. His sharp eyes and outthrust jaw defied an answer.

Of all the men in the room—perhaps because he had outgrown his enthusiasm for the human passions—the least perturbed was the mayor. He blew on his spectacles and wiped them carefully with his silk handkerchief. "Remarkable summing up, Mr. Whitaker. Remarkable. Of course, there is another word besides 'murder' which has not been mentioned, and I am sure I could make just as logical a case for my word as you have made for yours. The word is most often associated with age, but that I am told is a common error."

The mayor smiled at the silence which waited for him.

"The word?" he asked himself. "The word, gentlemen, is 'amnesia.'"

Amnesia. Whitaker wished he had thought of that. The funny thing was the mayor was right. You could make a case for amnesia, just as you could for murder. Or kidnapping. Or anything else.

Was that the way with all criminal detection—throw up ideas like clay pigeons and shoot at them until you score a hit? Whitaker had read so many crime stories in his long critical career that detection seemed easy, a logical process. Now he knew. There was no logical order of evidence, because crime was illogical.

Oddly, he had reasoned out his whole murder theory in the space of seconds. The argument came to him in the council chamber the instant before he spoke, and now he was in the regrettable position of having to defend at leisure an opinion formed in haste. He had put in almost twenty-four hours at it since, and was making little progress.

Whitaker sat alone on the grass watching the evening's *King Lear* rehearsal with only half an eye. It was a dreary performance. Some vital quality was gone with Loren Clift. The dancer had set a swift poetic tempo. Without him the whole show seemed dull and clumsy. Mitch Fallon huddled on his heels in the pit, gripping his own head in a violent armlock, an attitude of acute self-torture. "Midseason cramps" was the phrase for Fallon's fits of despair, but tonight, with a key actor missing, Mitch had good reason to be troubled.

The deep grass of the amphitheatre cushioned the sound of moving feet. Whitaker was not aware of a human presence until he leaned back and found his hand locked on a bristling joint of live flesh. He recoiled with a shudder and turned to find Night Officer Willard Pruitt seated behind him, one trouser leg drawn up at the knee, revealing a strip of bare ankle between the cuff and the sock.

Pruitt chuckled. "Just who was you expecting, Mr. Whitaker?"

"Pruitt, do you plan these ghastly little surprises in advance?"

"Tricks of the trade," Pruitt said. "Like the psychiatrists, you know? The first thing a man does when you surprise him shows where his mind really is."

"You may have something at that, Pruitt. Tonight I am at a very low level, mentally. I have invented a crime that may never have happened."

"Sounded right to me yesterday when you told it," Pruitt said, unconvincingly.

Pruitt's black-sleeved arms were clasped around his knees. To Dan he looked young, strong, and reliable. His eyes were intelligent. Only in his speech did he betray a certain inexperience.

"My arguments seem to fall apart when I think them over," Dan explained. "Take that one about Clift being held, forcibly, in the arbour until the girl ran away. It would take a very strong man to hold Clift. He was supple as an eel."

"A strong man. Sure. You find 'em all the time in criminal cases. Muscle and trouble go together. I'd make a first-rate convict myself, Mr. Whitaker, if I hadn't decided this was the easy side of the law."

"Have you had experience on the other side?" Dan asked.

"As a con?" Pruitt laughed. "Not me. Ma would have threshed me purple. She was a big woman—bigger than any of her sons."

While the two men talked, the opening scene of *King Lear* ended. As the king's court moved off the main stage and his two elder daughters swiftly plotted to beware their father's waywardness, a single actor sauntered out to the apron, planted one foot on the rail, and addressed his anger to the dark night:

"Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law my services are bound. . . ."

"Take that fella up there," Pruitt said. "He's big enough to hold a man the way you said. Even actors have muscles."

Whitaker sat listening, like a juggler, with separately balanced handfuls of words, Pruitt's comment confused in his mind with Edmund's soliloquy:

"... Why bastard? Wherefore base? When my

dimensions are as well compact, my mind as generous and my shape as true as honest madam's issue? . . .'"

"He has the dimensions, all right," Whitaker borrowed aptly from the dialogue.

"‘. . . fine word—legitimate! Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed—’"

"A proper scorn for the law. . . ."

"‘—and my invention thrive, Edmund the base shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper . . .’"

"‘. . . but I would find it hard to visualize Sewell in that murder scene I described.’"

"Why?" Pruitt asked.

"He has no interest in women."

"Really?"

"I don't mean Sewell is abnormal," Whitaker said hastily, "but to overpower a man in the act of making love to a woman suggests to me a violent interest in the woman herself. Barney's interest in the other sex, as I have observed it, is non-violent to the point of being downright rude."

On stage there was a pause while Mitch Fallon asked Sewell to repeat the bastard's soliloquy.

"Did you say Loren Clift was 'making love' to that girl in 'the arbour?'" Pruitt remarked. "The girl did not tell me she was being made love to."

"If you had known Clift you might have a different impression of that little dancing scene in the arbour, Pruitt. Did you ever see the male peacock strutting before its mate?"

"Gee!" The young policeman's expression of awed innocence was almost comic. "From all I'm hearing that Clift must have been quite a guy. I wish we could find him!"

"We will," Whitaker said with more conviction than he felt.

"Okay—tell me where, Mr. Whitaker. The chief could sure use an idea."

"I am long on theory, but short on fact," Dan

confessed. "The next thing I would do might strike you as silly."

"Tell me," Pruitt said. "I'll decide if it's silly."

Dan was improvising again. He did not really have a true plan. He selected a wooden match from his shirt pocket and chewed it with a show of concentration, while Edmund the illegitimate shouted his savage pæan of lawlessness:

"... and my invention thrive, Edmund the base shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper—Now, gods, stand up for bastards!"

The actor flung wide his arms, the great chest filling with his challenge, a splendid figure, god-like.

The hush of the audience trembled on the air, a silent ovation. Barney Sewell had discovered the true depth of Edmund's arrogance, the heart of malice laying claim to the will of the gods. Every muscle of his fine figure seemed to inflate with inspired villainy, marching defiantly across the dim-lit apron, head high, shouldering defiantly into the night. It was Evil with the dignity of Faith. It left a strange, breathless vacancy on the stage.

Dan Whitaker, still fascinated by the scene he had witnessed a dozen times, returned with difficulty to the practical world of Officer Willard Pruitt. "I am afraid my own invention is not exactly thriving," he said.

He took the match from his lips and began to draw a series of aimless marks on a bare patch of black ground. Without actually guiding his strokes he found he had sketched two straight lines converging to form an arrow.

Whitaker scuffed out the meaningless symbol with the heel of his shoe.

"Well, how do we find Clift?" Pruitt persisted.

"Tell the chief to forget my theory of murder," Dan said suddenly. "Especially tell the papers to forget."

"You change your mind pretty fast, Mr. Whitaker. That's not so good in my business."

This was only a hunch—another bit of sheer inspiration—but Whitaker launched himself into it.

The thing in his mind was not easy to explain. He was sure, he said, that a certain type of murderer was unsatisfied if his crime went undetected. It was like the old theory of the science teachers that a sound did not exist if there was no ear to hear it. So a crime did not exist until someone recognized it as a crime. If there was a murderer here in this town, was he capable of keeping his own secret, or was the crime so big inside him that it had to be shared?

"You mean keep the thing quiet until the murderer gets restless and calls attention to it?" Pruitt questioned.

"Yes."

Pruitt considered. "I like your idea, all except for one thing, Mr. Whitaker."

"What's that?"

"If you're right then this Loren Clift is dead; and the way I see it, a boy like that—what I mean, I never met him, but I wish to God he was alive!"

Whitaker said nothing, but the word that rose up in his throat and silently receded might have been "Amen."

5

The structure of the outdoor theatre, accurate as far as it went, was not an exact duplication of Shakespeare's famous Globe; to an expert it would have appeared that a piece of the Globe, including all of the stage and its three balconies, had been sawn off and transported intact from old metropolitan London to modern rural America. The seating galleries which encircled Shakespeare's audience were missing.

Under the roof behind the five staging areas was a honeycomb of odd little rooms, fitted haphazardly into the supporting framework. The strangest of all was the costume room, a half-floored area running the full length of the upper story under the rear slant of the roof,

cluttered with busy sewing-machines, masculine seamstresses awkwardly wielding their needles, actors half in and half out of their clothes. Jerkins, doublets, tunics, ruffs, breeches, and Elizabethan gowns slowly emerged from conglomerate bits of old drapery, lace, discarded clothing, silks, satins, even gunny sacks. Someone had scrawled with chalk on a large barrel of scraps: "From rags to riches."

The most remarkable feature about the room—and perhaps the one which attracted so many volunteer workers—was the fact that the half-completed floor gave conversational access to five rooms at once.

For a week now Loren Clift had been the major topic of conversation. It was possible to sit idly hemstitching an Elizabethan undergarment and hear, through the ceilings of the rooms below, six simultaneous versions of Clift's disappearance plus individual estimates of his character. The general tone was one of reverent awe. Clift, whose absence left such a startling vacancy in the rehearsals, had become a kind of hero. . . .

It was late on a Friday morning, and Anthony Riordan was busy in the costume room applying a silver dye, miraculously transforming loosely meshed cloth jackets into suits of old English armour. His hands were slowly becoming an icy grey. A mirror would have told him that mottles of silver were appearing on his face, his throat, and even his dark hair.

Riordan was annoyed with himself. The legend of Loren Clift had become more of a romantic complication than the man himself. Three times he had tried a friendly approach to Ethel Tucker and found her withdrawn and moody. There were lapses on the stage, too. She had not lost her feeling for delivery, but a good actress must live her role between the lines, she must react to others—and Cordelia was falling into a kind of trance, alert enough to her cues, but unmoved by the cross-currents of emotion on the stage.

Riordan was annoyed because this really was not his

affair. Let the girl make a fool of herself. Let her decide she was in love, that the myth was more desirable than the man. What difference could it possibly make to a rapidly ageing Englishman with limited talents and no romantic assets except experience?

Now there, he told himself, was an idea! The girl needed experience! He catalogued that bit of self-advice in his mind, not really expecting to use it. . . .

His fellow costumers left for lunch, but Riordan decided to finish his job before trying to clean the stuff off his hands. Near the end of the noon hour he could hear actors idling about in the rooms under the floor. Light steps sounded on the stairs behind him, but he did not anticipate the familiar husky feminine voice which spoke from the doorway: "I was supposed to be measured today."

Riordan glanced over his shoulder. Ethel Tucker looked like a high-school girl in her flair skirt and strapless blouse. She must have been lying in the summer sun. Her shoulders were a healthy tan, her bare arms as smooth and brown as young birches. The beautiful hair was primly knotted at the nape of her neck.

He almost told her to come back later, but he felt a sudden urgency in this opportunity that would not likely come his way again. He saw the costume director's measurement chart and beside it a yard-long tape. He smiled. "I would not do this for every woman who comes along, but for you—"

She laughed in a friendly way. "All right, if you know what you're doing."

Riordan absently wiped his paint-soaked hands on the seat of his old trousers. He was not quite sure that he did know what he was doing. Confused by his unexpected lack of aggressiveness he pretended to study the chart.

"Height?" he asked in a dry, unnatural voice.

"Five feet five."

He scribbled on the chart. "Weight?"

"One hundred and seven."

"Next is the waist. Do you know your own size?"

"Let me have the tape, Tony," she said, laughing. "I measured for some of the other girls."

He handed it over. She whipped the yellow tape deftly around her waist, quoting the measurement, then repeating with a slightly larger loop around the fullest curve of her hips. She even managed to take her own bust measurement while he looked on foolishly. She held one end of the tape against her hip bone and he crouched down and pressed the measure against the curve of her ankle.

"You'll have to do the arm," she said, when he had recorded her leg length.

She extended her left arm. Riordan pressed the tape down against the soft curve of her shoulder with his left thumb and ran the tape out along her arm to the wrist. His lightly moving fingers reminded him of a big grey spider. He stepped behind her and measured from bare shoulder to shoulder. When he wrote the last figure his hand was trembling. He snapped the pencil down on the chart and swore inaudibly at his own ridiculous behaviour.

"What did you say, Tony?"

He repeated the profanity aloud, and she looked at him as if she had just seen him for the first time. He gripped her left arm lightly, and his right arm came up around her back, pulling her toward him while his lips came down soft against her own.

She seemed to stop breathing. Her breasts pressed, trembling, against him. He let her arm go, waiting for her lips to draw away of their own volition. He felt the warm clinging pressure of them before she relaxed her weight, dropping back on the silent rubber heels of her white sandals, and took a deep sighing breath.

They moved apart without a word. Her eyes went swiftly over his face, searching it like a stranger's. She was not smiling, but neither was she angry.

"Tony?"

"Yes?"

"When did you think of doing that?"

He laughed. "Weeks ago. I winked at you in a mirror, quite unintentionally."

"Why did you wait so long?"

He was puzzled. "Tell me what chances I missed," he said sharply. "The hotel lobby? The elevator? I could have come down to your room, but that seemed a bit continental at the time."

There was a wistful trace of a smile on her lips. "Tony, I wish you—" She left the wish unstated and turned away from him.

"You wish I had been a little quicker than Loren Clift?"

A tremor passed through her shoulders, and the effect was almost frightening because the silver imprint of his own hand was visible across the naked curve of her back, the fingers twisted ominously around the base of the throat. Riordan stared at the strange impression, fascinated. There was another mark, like a silver bracelet, encircling her left arm above the elbow.

He stepped over to a table and poured some cleaning fluid on a rag. "What if Clift comes back?" he said.

She turned on him, eagerly. "Do you think he will come back?"

There was no denying her excitement, the importance of the question.

"I think it's damned unlikely!" he said gruffly.

The shock of his harsh answer was written painfully across her face. Angry with himself, as much as with her, he forgot the turpentine rag in his hand and went back to his work table, feeling that he had lost ground, that the kiss after all was meaningless, that Clift, however she might deny it, had an unshakable grip on her imagination.

Riordan dipped his brush into the dye. The girl stood for several minutes watching him. He knew his manner appeared sullen, but that was not really how he felt. How did he feel? Like a spent rocket. You go up fast and you come down hard, right on your bloody head!

He heard the girl's footsteps, light and swift, going down the stairs.

Riordan got back from his lunch in time to find Dan Whitaker, director of the afternoon rehearsal, delivering a lecture on tempo to a group scattered over the lawn outside the main stage exit.

Riordan squatted in the outer circle and whispered to one of the costume girls: "What have you got that will take this blasted silver dye off a man's hands?"

Two rows in front a familiar male head turned sharply around. "Hey," shouted Van Horn, the irrepressible, "that remark solves the 'case of the clammy hand.' Tony Riordan, by gad! A foreigner! Men of America, arise!"

Dan Whitaker was annoyed by the interruption. He told Van Horn to shut up and went on with his lecture.

The Englishman lit himself a cigarette and wondered what in the devil Van Horn was talking about. His fingers smelled of dye, and his fingertips glistened eerily in the sunlight. Suddenly he remembered the silver print his hand had made on Ethel Tucker's skin, and he felt himself growing small and hard inside. He had forgotten to tell the girl that she carried a brand!

He angrily closed his hands into fists and kept them that way. When the group moved into the amphitheatre to begin rehearsal he caught Van Horn for a moment just inside the gate in the shadow of the wall. "Van Horn, you have ceased to be funny."

Ollie, shirtless and trouserless as usual, looked like a crestfallen monkey. "You mean about the silver hand on the lady's—"

"Drop it, Ollie!"

"You mean—"

"Righto, I mean!" Riordan said in his best imitation of the iron-jawed Englishman. "I said drop it, Ollie!"

"Sure." Van Horn's face was reddening sheepishly. "I'll forget the whole thing."

Riordan lingered grimly by the inner wall, his fists still hanging at his sides, until a few curious actors stopped looking at him. Then he went quietly backstage and sampled cleaning fluids until he found one that took every trace of silver from his hands.

During spare moments in the afternoon various Elizabethans squared off with rapiers or broadswords to practise their stage encounters.

Mitch Fallon had found that wooden swords gave off the wrong sound and tin crumpled into ridiculous shapes so this year all weapons were solid steel, capable of splitting a man's skull, heavy to wield, and dangerous in the violence of amateur combat. Every stroke had to be rehearsed again and again for perfect timing. If a man knew where the next blow would land, he could be there with the flat of his sword and a tight wrist to parry the stroke. Mitch Fallon was violently particular about sword-play. It was said that Mitch had a recurring nightmare of an actor who was neatly beheaded because he had missed a cue and come on without his sword.

In *King Lear*, Ollie Van Horn as the impudent servant Oswald had to be killed at the hand of Anthony Riordan as Edgar. Ollie looked slightly glum when he faced Riordan this afternoon.

Riordan decided to be merciful. He cut Oswald down with perfect dispatch and promptly gave the stricken man a hand-up from the grass.

Fifty feet away on the grass slope of the knoll, Barney Sewell and Paul Enright were practising the brief encounter of Edmund and Kent from the stock scene.

"Have a go, Edmund?" Riordan called.

Sewell caught Enright's swift overhead stroke with an easy, shielding counterstroke. He turned and waved a hand at the Englishman.

Edmund and Edgar wore visors and shields for the climactic encounter of the play. Riordan laced the big shield on his left arm and set the heavy wire cage on his

head. He felt big with this grotesque armoured distension of himself, though he knew his size could not match that of the man who faced him.

"Let's go!" Riordan shouted through the mesh of his visor.

Sewell took his stance: "This sword of mine shall give them instant way where they shall rest forever—Trumpets, speak!"

The actors charged, shield to shield, and Riordan set himself for the impact of Sewell's body. He took it glancingly, twisting away. Sewell rushed past, two steps, whirled, crouched, and the great sword whistled at Riordan's head.

The Englishman's sword flashed up, blade against blade, resounding. Every exchange shook Riordan all the way to his heels, but he refused to complain of Sewell's impetuosity. It was good stuff. Dynamic. The audience would be shattered. Let Sewell be Edmund in fact, let him be the devil himself—Riordan would take whatever he gave. A man came out of the war in Europe—if he had really fought the war—with reserves of strength that could not be defined. Riordan knew the strength was there. He had never felt better in his life than he felt meeting this superb Edmund, man for man.

At the end of the first trial the men sprawled panting on the ground without removing their visors.

Ollie Van Horn clapped his hands. "Terrific! That'll prostrate 'em! It's the best scene in the play, next to . . . the storm . . . on the heath. . . ."

Ollie's voice faded away dismally.

Riordan knew what the boy was thinking—that the heath scene had lost the brilliant counterpoint of Loren Clift's acting—the trembling, dying Fool dogging the heels of a mad master.

"We got to find Loren, we got to," Ollie said.

Paul Enright, an admiring spectator of the Edmund-Edgar duel, sympathetically regarded his friend's downcast countenance. "I hear an F.B.I. man is coming in if

they fail to find Loren soon. Personally, I don't think they will. Every possible place has been searched."

"Not every place."

The voice was so distant, so gentle, that it could hardly be identified.

Tony Riordan rose on one elbow. "You mean there is one place they have overlooked?" His voice was muffled in the visor, echoing queerly in his ears.

There was no answer.

Riordan had been thinking along the same lines. "They might," he said, "have a go under Main Street Bridge. . . ."

Van Horn and Riordan were suddenly given on stage warnings, and the latter barely had time to strip off his shield and visor. He and Ollie raced in on their cue lines like stampeding horses, drawing an audible snarl from the director.

At the end of the scene the two men were called down front for a lecture on timeliness. In spite of his laziness of posture, and his drawling philosophy of idleness, Dan Whitaker was the hardest director of the three on negligent actors. Van Horn listened meekly and replied: "Say, Mr. Whitaker, have they looked for Loren Clift under Main Street Bridge?"

"Get out of here!" Whitaker launched a graceless kick at Van Horn's receding rear. "This is a rehearsal of Shakespeare," he roared at the assembled cast. "Anyone think otherwise? . . . All right, let's get on with it!"

It was a trying day for Whitaker; it had been a trying week, mainly because he was having more difficulty than any of his actors in keeping his mind on Shakespeare. He had started the cry of murder and now bore the burden of proof.

Whitaker sat for a half-hour after the rehearsal, alone in the hot pit of the theatre, staring at his notes, trying to regain his feeling for Shakespeare's comedy, to ignore

the shadowy sprite that danced nimbly from one shoulder to the other, too quick for the eye, whispering in his ear: "Find me . . . find me . . . find me . . ."

Three times lately Whitaker had caught himself taking a quick, startled glance over his own shoulder. He was haunted.

He slammed down his notes in disgust, weighted them with the leg of a chair, and strode off to the police station.

Officer Willard Pruitt was doing some clerical work in the chief's office. Whitaker pushed his thin face against the little barred window. "Pruitt, where is the Main Street Bridge?"

Pruitt looked up affably from his work. "Hi, Mr. Whitaker. That's where Main Street crosses the creek. It's not really a bridge that you can see. There's a long aqueduct under the business district. You know where the tunnel begins at the bottom of the park?"

"Oh, that!" Whitaker stood silently, musing. "How long is the tunnel?"

"About two hundred feet."

"Straight?"

"No, it cuts to the right at the halfway point. That's why you can't see through it."

"Does it ever jam up?"

"No, she flows as clean as a whistle. The fire department sees to that every year. If they didn't she'd back up and flood."

"How long since the last cleaning?"

Pruitt scratched his head. "Early spring, I think, before the high snows began to melt."

"Don't those heavy boulders move downstream with high water?"

"Sometimes. I remember the year of the flood—"

"Pruitt, that tunnel might be jammed!"

"Huh?"

"A man's body—"

"By golly!" Pruitt sank his teeth into a wooden pencil.

His eyes gleamed. He led the way out of the station, walking rapidly down the curving sidewalk, speaking apologetically to Whitaker: "We checked all the upper stream, and the sheriff's men covered all the area below town, but I sure as hell should have given more thought to that tunnel. I guess I just figured nothing would stop inside."

They were a block from the black hole where the mountain stream swept under the city when Whitaker recognized two young actors parking in the square. The boys wore bathing trunks, which was not appropriate downtown dress. Whitaker glanced up at Pruitt for a sign of disapproval.

The boys waited beside their car, pale-skinned and self-conscious. "Going to watch 'em dive, Mr. Whitaker?" greeted the taller one.

"Dive?" Whitaker snapped. "Where? What for?"

"The big tunnel. They're diving for Loren Clift's body."

Whitaker caught the policeman's arm and broke into a run.

6

A swimmer emerged from the tunnel in a long glide and stood up, dripping, in a rush of water as high as his waist. Standing on the bank, drying himself, he reported a jam of logs and rocks at the bend of the tunnel. The water piled into them and geysered to the roof of the tunnel before finding a narrow gap for its furious downward course.

Officer Willard Pruitt squinted into the golden afternoon sun. He thought it might be a job for the fire department, but the actors who had promoted the search would not be put off. Tony Riordan stepped suddenly into the water and took the first icy shock, gasping. With a few dripping handfuls he rubbed his belly and

shoulders until they glowed a fiery red. He glanced back to see if anyone was coming and began the unsteady march into the tunnel. Behind him he heard Paul Enright hit the water with a howl.

The diameter of the flume was slightly more than the height of a man, which meant that the water at waist depth filled the aqueduct to about one-third of its capacity.

At first the going was easy, like wading a steady stream. Fifty feet inside the darkness and the roar of water funnelled together in concentrated assault on the senses. Already Riordan was feeling numb. . . . What had prompted him to make this chilling quest for a lost boy? The swift cold of the river seemed to strip him naked, and he saw his own motives as they truly were. . . . Ethel Tucker could not reject the memory of Loren Clift as long as she thought of him as alive. The mystery of Clift's absence multiplied his attractiveness. The contemplation of love is more satisfying than its realization. Clift had to be brought back, made real again and comparable with other men! Let him compete as himself, not as a phantom!

Struggling forward, stumbling as the rocks grew slippery, stunned by the cold water, Tony Riordan knew that he must find Clift, dead or alive.

Let him be alive. Let the girl decide for herself. Give the boy back. Let her decide.

He slipped once and fell flat, all the way under, felt the water seize him and thrust ahead. Scrambling up, he blindly faced the wrong way and would have gone that way, toward the light, but a tall figure splashed toward him and threw an arm around his waist.

"Tony, how's it going?" shouted Paul Enright above the turmoil. "Wife'll kill me for tackling this!"

Riordan was too chilled to speak. He did not even notice Enright's reference to his wife. The only thing he could think now was to get on with it and return to the warm sun.

He led the way around the curve of the tunnel, hesitating when he saw through a blur of water the black fury ahead. The whole left side of the tunnel was choked. The water slammed into the pile, churned crazily, sending a spray to the curved black roof of the cavern, and then whipped through a hole at the right.

The dammed-up stream rose to the height of a man's shoulders. Riordan braced his feet on the bottom, but felt the water tugging and twisting him toward the barricade. A powerful swimmer, he let himself into the tide and found that a long back stroke equalized the force of the water. He drifted in, tracing with bare feet over the shapeless heap of rock, and trash, and mud.

Riordan had an idea. The roar made speech difficult. He swam back, tugging at Paul's arm, then standing upright shouted into the cup of his ear: "Hold my feet, Paul, and I'll go in with my hands."

Riordan swam out immediately, felt Paul's hands locking on his ankles, and let himself go deep into that smashing turbulence. The water flailed him icily, seeming to strip the hide from his body. His hands worked rapidly, feeling, recognizing—raw joints of wood, smooth rock, twisted tree limbs, and sucking ooze.

Deep in the left corner of the jam he felt something that seemed to cringe away from his touch. He tried again, and the object moved limply. He got both hands down, tugging. His lungs were hurting now, the breath clamouring for release.

Something gave, and Riordan clutched it against him, twisting, swimming, kicking free from Enright's grasp, doubling in the water. He came up with a huge gasp. He breathed enough for two men, stood upright in the icy stream, pummelled, half frozen, but alive, free.

The passage back to the mouth of the tunnel was something never to be remembered, a blank space in time. He knew he stood in the open daylight, arms hugged against his body, blowing wearily through the film of water that ran like tears down his face. Paul Enright

huddled shivering behind him, and a red-headed girl cried out at the sight.

Riordan searched the expectant crowd. He saw the group of women who had not been there before. He moved up the bank past the tall policeman who waited, arms crossed, feet spread wide, expectant. Riordan dropped the thing he cradled in his arms at the policeman's feet and moved ahead.

He walked straight to the women, and his hand caught a girl's arm, pressing cold and wet where it had earlier left a silver brand. "You go home," Riordan said.

"Oh, Tony!"

"Mind what I say. Go home."

The women clustered together and moved away in shuffling silence. Riordan, dark hair streaming down his face, half blinded, still felt the girl's arm warm in his hand, and he had to look down to be sure it was no longer there. He found a towel and rubbed himself raw while Officer Willard Pruitt slowly turned a soggy shoe in his big hands.

The firemen and sheriff's officers worked in hip boots and rubber ponchos until darkness. One of them came out finally carrying the limp body in his arms, stepping into the bright glare of a searchlight. A long bare foot hung down crookedly against the fireman's booted thigh, bouncing and leaping with a startling show of animation.

A hundred people lined the stream. The earlier audience of fellow-actors and friends sat far back on the sloping grass in the shadow of the high theatre wall, gloomy and speechless. The confirming word had come whispering out of the tunnel like a swift chill wind. The actors moved away, climbing the hill, drifting mutely and sadly into their empty amphitheatre.

Dan Whitaker still sat on the hillside when they carried the boy away. He had caught Ollie Van Horn earlier in the evening and tenaciously hung on to him.

With Officer Willard Pruitt between them, Dan and Ollie sat smoking cigarettes.

"Now we know," Dan said quietly. His mind was not patient enough for the solemnity of death. It was always moving ahead, finding reasons. "Ollie, which one of you thought of looking in the tunnel?"

Ollie tried to remember, unsuccessfully. "It came up at sword practice—Edgar and Edmund and Kent and I."

"You don't know who first mentioned it."

"I'm not sure. Riordan, maybe. Later in the day we all agreed it was a place no one had looked, so we went home for our bathing-suits."

"Why not go to the police?" Pruitt asked.

"I don't know. Riordan and Sewell thought we should try it ourselves. Loren was our boy."

Whitaker took an unlighted match from his pocket and picked at the ground between his feet.

"What was the argument this afternoon between you and Tony Riordan, Ollie?"

Van Horn fidgeted, unhappily. "Oh, just a personal matter."

"Ollie, this is important."

Ollie described the little mystery of the silver handprint on the lady's shoulders. He and some of the others had thought it was funny, but Ethel Tucker was embarrassed, and Tony Riordan was surprisingly angry.

"Did anyone ever explain how it happened?"

"Mr. Whitaker," Ollie pleaded, "Riordan said drop it—I'm dropping it!"

Whitaker pushed the matchstick into the soft loam. . . . "Riordan," he thought, and drew a long straight black mark. He lifted the match, repeated the name, and made another quick match stroke across the ground. Where the two lines met they formed an arrow pointing toward the black hole of Main Street Bridge.

A searchlight went off, a fire truck rumbled up the street, and the three men sat quietly listening to the water of the creek, the late snow melting to the sea.

PART FIVE

I

PAUL ENRIGHT LAY RESTLESSLY, HIS EYES TRACING THE familiar objects in the room by the pale stream of light from the single window: dresser, bed, a single chair, the alarm clock with its thin luminous skeleton hands. He stretched wearily, feeling the ache in every tired limb. The cold mountain stream had come near exhausting him completely. He thought, incongruously, that this must be how the Earl of Kent really felt after a night in the stocks.

Paul yawned and quoted Kent's rueful soliloquy: "All weary and o'er-watched, take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold this shameful lodging. . . ."

"Paul!" The whisper in his ear was like a caress. "What kind of a remark is that?"

"Just popped into my head," he said. "Do you realize, Glory, that this is the first time since our marriage that we have behaved like a normal husband and wife! So what have we got? Company!"

"Shhh, Paul!"

He rose on one elbow, silently regarding the drawn curtain that separated the tiny bedroom from the main cabin. "You think she'll hear? Good, that makes her one of the family. Maybe she'd hear better if I went out there."

"Paul, you stay right here with me!"

"Ah, you do want me then!"

"I want you to—Oh, Paul, what does get into you sometimes, the way you talk?"

"I just wanted to remind you that our married life has been highly irregular."

"I don't have to be reminded, darling. Oh, Paul!"

"This is a hell of a time to be crying."

"Paul, don't swear at me. Not now. That's how I feel. I want to cry—for us, for her."

"Sure, honey—" He pressed his lips on hers, and a tear found its way from her hot cheek to his own. His throat grew sore, swollen with all the feeling it had withheld for hours, and his own tears came.

"Paul, baby," she whispered, and all of her warmth came out to him, claimed him, comforting. . . .

Ethel Tucker lay on the long couch, wide-eyed. The soft glow of the Oregon night filled the room.

She heard the ticking clock and the whispering voices. It was like Glory to keep her husband here tonight, filling the cabin with all the human affection it could contain.

Ethel tried to sleep, but her eyes refused to stay closed. It was as if she dared not close them for fear they would miss something that was about to happen in the room, and her ear was preternaturally keen, listening.

The house became breathlessly silent, and she knew the Enrights were all too quietly asleep in a warm and shared serenity; but she had nothing like that, and she wondered, unhappily, if she ever would have. What secret had Loren Clift so brilliantly discovered to call her a spinster almost at the instant of his going, as if something in her repelled not only love but life itself?

She sat up, hugging her thin-clad knees, her heart pounding in protest. Tony Riordan had kissed her and then in a moment grown cold and turned away. What had she said, done wrong? Or was the repulsion something terrible and inherent in her? Would every man dissolve to nothing in her arms?

She climbed out of her narrow bed, shivering with emotional uneasiness and at the same time stifled by the hot summer stillness of the moonlit room. She crept to the door, opened it, and stepped outside.

No night in the world could be clearer than this. It was typical of the northwest summer. The moonlight fell in a soft radiance that could almost be felt as the sun's rays are felt. Except for the steep hills she could have seen for miles.

The screen door creaked faintly, but no one was aroused in the house. Out on the lawn the grass felt cool but not at all damp on her bare feet. Loren had said that grass was the perfect carpet for dancing, and she knew now what he meant, the rich feel of life that was in it. The warm wind sighed out of the trees, smelling so sweetly of pine it was like a drug. It penetrated the thinness of her gown and played over her like a gentle, exploring flame. She sank down into the grass and pressed her face and her breasts against the cool softness, and her anxiety was comforted and she slept. . . . The early sun streaked across the valley, and she uncoiled in its warmth like a silk-white caterpillar.

Everything on the breakfast table had an unexpectedly good taste. All of yesterday's moody wretchedness seemed to have vanished. Glory looked wonderful, a blue silk robe drawn tightly over her nightgown, open at the throat to show the tiny latent freckles on her shoulders. Her red hair, carefully combed for Paul's benefit, was like spun gold, and her cheeks showed high spots of red, as if his morning kiss still lingered there.

Ethel Tucker, by contrast, had tied up her fine blond hair in a bandanna and left her face smoothly pale, her lips untouched. Not that she would be hard to take with a man's breakfast, Paul thought—not at all.

Paul rubbed his bristling morning beard. "If you gals are going to keep dragging men home at night, you'd better invest in a razor."

"Dragging?" Glory shrieked. She threatened to dump the whole potful of coffee over his head. "You just refused to take the hint, mister, when we threw you out of the door."

Paul grinned. "Forceful, that's me. . . . Seriously, Miss Tucker, have you been happy spending *my* honeymoon with *my* wife?"

"Well, Glory has been very enlightening. Now I know how horrible men are without having to marry one of them."

"Smart girl," Paul agreed heartily. "Marry for money—like me. The rest of marriage is all on the brute level."

"Paul, don't give Ethel such ideas! It's not brutal at all, and you did not marry me for money."

There was a trace of truculence behind Paul's laugh. "What else would you call that monthly allowance of yours? Charity?"

"Oh, Paul." Glory looked at her friend in dismay. "He's always going on about my allowance, as if I had no right to use it in my own way. What do you think, Ethel? Is it wrong, what we're doing?"

Ethel took a very careful nibble at the corner of her toast. "Mmm, well—I suppose anything is wrong that makes two young married people live like—like *thieves*."

Glory, sipping her coffee, made an odd choking sound. The long red lashes showed her pained surprise.

"Oh, dear," Ethel said quickly, embarrassed. "I did not mean that word, not *thieves*—I meant it's wrong to be kept apart for any reason, not wrong in you people but a wrong situation. I'm sorry, Glory."

Paul reassuringly patted Ethel's shoulder. "That's putting it straight. I'm for you, Ethel. You make good sense."

Glory's natural buoyancy was never down for long. "It's nice that one of your wives makes sense, darling."

Paul chuckled. "You may not be kidding as much as you think, baby. This housekeeping situation looks down-right polygamous. How do I get out of here without alarming the neighbours?"

"The neighbours!" Glory hooted. "They don't even know we exist!"

Chief of Police John Searcy considered throwing the

telephone across the room. He resisted and placed the receiver on its stand with a shaky hand. He scowled at Willard Pruitt, who had just stepped in from the street and begun to scribble on a memorandum pad. Pruitt had become a twenty-four-hour man with his special assignment to the Clift investigation.

"That was Sophie McCall, Willard. She's been using her field glasses again. She reports young Enright spent the whole night this time—with *both* of the girls."

Pruitt laughed. "Did you tell her the girls *might* be chaperoning each other?"

Searcy groaned. "Next thing, she'll be taking pictures. With a telescopic camera." He threw up his short arms, which seemed almost dwarfish beside the length and bigness of his head. "Willard, why do people have to make issues where there are no issues? Ain't we got enough of a crime on our hands?"

"You don't think there's any connection?" Pruitt asked shrewdly.

"Between this boy-girl stuff and the death of Loren Clift? Well, it may be we got a sex crime, Willard, but take it from me that couple up at the Morgan cabin had nothing to do with it. Mrs. McCall don't know it, but she and her spying practically eliminate the two of them from suspicion. Not that they need an alibi."

"I wasn't thinking of them, John."

Searcy looked askance at the big shoulders bent in concentration over the desk. Surely Pruitt was not thinking of Mrs. McCall?

Pruitt's thick neck showed a red sunburn contrasting with a strip of naked white emerging from his collar. His long daylight hours were beginning to darken and toughen him.

"John," the younger man went on, "if I had to choose which I'd be more afraid to tangle with on a dark night, a young guy and a gal who can't resist each other, or the old lady who would like to thwart 'em, I'd vote to be afraid of the old lady."

Searcy's brows went up. Pruitt was nobody's fool.
"Lunatic fringe, you mean—hey, Willard?"
"That's it, John."

The two men sat for a moment, intrigued by the thought. Searcy laced his hands around his belly, his mind drifting into aimless, fruitless by-paths, and Pruitt, with a shrug, went back to his work.

Pruitt's notes read:

Test One: Inflated rubber dummy, approximate weight and buoyancy of grown man, dropped from six possible sites of accidental fall. Dummy snagged in identical spot each time, at log dam fifty feet below footbridge. Dummy, when dropped below log dam, drifted one hundred feet in two hours. It could not be made to float through the rock maze in the lower rapids by any combination of currents or motions. Live swimmers, trying the same route, found three water passages that were impassable to the bulk of a human body.

Conclusion: Loren Clift's body must have entered water at least one-half mile from arbour at a point where stream levels out and flows without interruption to Main Street Bridge.

Test Two: Man falling from stone pedestrian bridge leading to Lower Terrace Drive could have drifted into tunnel. Fall was duplicated from every possible angle.

Conclusion: Body would have struck sandy bottom at depth of three feet, but there are no rocks to account for skull concussion above right ear.

Pruitt left his notes on the chief's desk and went out on his beat again. He was eagerly questioned by the row of uniformed men on the fire house bench. Wary of his replies, Pruitt admitted that the medical report showed Loren Clift was unconscious but not dead before drowning.

Fireman Bill Simmons, oldest man on the crew, wiry and tough-minded, wondered if the inquest would try for a verdict of murder or accident. Pruitt was advancing no opinions.

"Why don't they settle for self-defence, Willard?" Bill asked.

"How do you mean?"

"The girl, I mean. Hell, everybody knows she's covering her own reputation. The boy gets out of hand, and she gives him a push. He trips, cracks the water and doesn't answer, so she gets scared and makes a run for it."

Pruitt thrust out his jaw, belligerently. "Whoever tells you that, Bill, shut 'em up. The girl's not under suspicion, and she sure did not pack a hundred and fifty pounds of man a half-mile downstream!"

Simmons smiled mildly. "Who says she was not downstream at the very beginning? There's enough grass down there for a midnight caper—"

"Bill!" Pruitt's eyes sparked. "That's just the kind of gossip to get a case confused. 'Benefit of doubt'—you ever hear of that, Bill? This is the U.S.A. Don't put the girl on trial, damn it, until the law asks for it!"

Little Bill Simmons, American, family man, taxpayer, reliable citizen, was enjoying himself. He'd also heard the girl was making quite a nuisance of herself up at the Morgan cabin these nights.

Pruitt's red face was suddenly dangerous. Bill Simmons looked up, affably, uncowed.

"Who told you that, Bill?" Pruitt asked hoarsely.

"Old lady McCall phoned my wife today."

Pruitt swore bitterly, then collected himself, the purple violence receding from his face. "Bill, I'm asking you not to repeat that story. This is important."

"Why, sure, Willard. You're the boss."

Pruitt moved on down the street, his boots resounding with a weary uneven beat.

Fireman Bill Simmons bit off a piece of wooden match, pulled in his neck like a turtle, shot his head out, and spat the tiny projectile all the way across the twelve-foot sidewalk and into the street.

Bill Simmons generally ate dinner at the same restaurant every night. There was a new little blond waitress

he'd had his eyes on for a month. She did things with her hips under the white uniform that set a man thinking. She was on duty as usual, friendly and talkative.

She should be in Shakespeare, Bill told her, jokingly. She had the looks and the figure. Of course, you had to have the character, too. It took a lot of character.

The girl leaned a plump elbow on the counter, wondering what was Bill's idea of the right character for an actress.

No deep emotions, all on the surface, Bill decided after some reflection. You had to be a little hard, he guessed, to throw a party the same night they sent your boy friend to the morgue.

The waitress, shocked, would have liked to hear more about the party, but Bill, aside from identifying the place and the name of the actress, kept his tongue in his head out of decent respect for the dead. Interestedly, without malice, contentedly bolting his food, Bill watched the little blonde carry the story on to three of her fellow-waitresses. Most of all he watched her walk, the way the fat little thigh rippled under the crisp starch of her uniform. . . .

A half-hour after Bill went his way a dark man wearing dark trousers and a soft, sweaty, slightly dirty white shirt, open at the throat, came into the same restaurant to take his usual place, alone, in the back booth. He was handsome in a rather indefinable way, but seldom smiled. Secret observation would have revealed a tendency of the mouth to move jerkily, as if speaking silently, and there was a restless play of the muscles along the jaw that was not like a twitch, more like a constant, unrelenting nervous tension.

The waitresses silently vied with each other to serve him. He always had to be reminded to order his meal. When the waitress spoke there was a deeply rewarding regard in his strangely penetrating eyes.

The little blond waitress served him tonight. She

always had to lean on the table to write his order, disarmingly unaware how her uniform gaped to expose the soft curve of her breasts. Her pink-white skin had some intangible quality of freshness about it, without blemish. Her lips, full and red, needed little make-up. Her hands were clean and soft and white.

She would never have considered speaking to this man about his actor friends and their lewd parties, but after he had paid his cheque and had gone out with that peculiar full-chested walk of his, she remarked to another waitress, within easy earshot of eight tables and booths accommodating at the moment thirty hungry people, that it was too bad all of the actors could not be as nice as this one.

By this time it was not surprising that a middle-aged business man who was widely acquainted in town should whisper to his wife between gritted teeth that the young actress responsible for that poor boy's drowning did not waste any time taking up with another man.

His wife was carving her steak with quick, neat, precise strokes of the knife. "It would be *very* interesting to hear *all* that girl could tell about what happened in the park! . . ."

2

Dan Whitaker knew a man in the State Department at Washington who had no difficulty in getting information from British intelligence. Within two days Dan received a wire which he passed along to the police with his own underscorings:

"*Re:* Anthony Riordan, lieutenant British infantry, war record excellent, no medals. *Medical record:* six weeks field hospital, shrapnel and concussion, shell-burst. Discharge honourable, no medical complications. *Civilian record:* professional actor, announcer B.B.C., exchange scholarship Columbia University. No criminal, alcoholic, or drug record.

Unmarried. Mother deceased. Father remarried, Chilean consular secretary. One brother, one sister. *Unfavourable*: Riordan fired from Scottish Repertory Theatre, Glasgow, personality reasons; sister, Rebecca Riordan, co-respondent divorce suit, 1947, proven charge, adultery. Rebecca married John Benelot, 1948. *Summary*: normal."

Willard Pruitt and Chief Searcy agreed with Dan that the wire report was of doubtful value. Concussion, personality maladjustment, and a divorce scandal were just so many words until they had been integrated into a man's character.

Pruitt had studied criminal bulletins for five years and relied heavily on what he called "facial types." Pruitt on Anthony Riordan: physically strong, mentally tough, mature, stable, sane. . . .

Mid-July was uncommonly hot. The snow was all gone from the mountains, and the big conifer forests grew crackling dry. An explosive restlessness was in the air, waiting for the single inflammatory spark. Even the nights in the big open theatre were oppressive. The actors grew tense, off-tempered. Sudden illness claimed them. Mitch Fallon, struggling for individual characterizations, ignored the rash of miscues and forgotten lines, driving for the story, the idea. Flashes of brilliance enlivened the smouldering, uneven mass of the whole. Never had the timing been so bad, but on the other hand never had there been so many emotional climaxes in one play.

Never let 'em rest, was Fallon's theory of audience control, and once his cast, from their widely assorted backgrounds, could add the final element of speed to their growing depth of understanding, Mr. Shakespeare would have himself a show.

Ethel Tucker was out with a bad case of laryngitis, ordered to her bed. On a Tuesday night Anthony Riordan interrupted a second run-through at the beginning of Act Two. He leaned out from the rail of the main balcony,

calling down to Fallon: "Will you need me after this scene, Mitch?"

Fallon, who did not like such requests, frowned at Riordan, one of the most dependable men in the company.

"Mmm—no, Tony. Go ahead. I'm going to work the stock scene over until it's right, and you're not in that."

In the audience Dan Whitaker drew deeply on his pipe and worried about Riordan's early departure. When the Englishman had vanished backstage Whitaker rose, stretching, and moved outside the circle of spectators, soft-footed on the carpeting grass, through the big gate and into the night. He saw Tony Riordan striding down a curving alleyway that led to Main Street.

Some of the lines from the play carried over the walls, and Whitaker listened with interest to the fragments. Cornwall and Regan, Lea's son-in-law and second daughter, came on noisily. Edmund's voice contrasted deeply with the shrill, high-tempered tones of the others: "'Twas my duty, sir. . . .'"

Whitaker, half a mind on the lines, heard Regan's husky voice: "'Thus, out of season, threading dark-eyed night. . . .'"

The words made Whitaker uneasy. Slipping back into the theatre, at the end of the scene, he approached Mitch Fallon and asked to borrow his car. Absently, Mitch produced his keys, announcing: "Anyone not in the stock scene may go. I'll give you notes tomorrow."

Edmund appeared suddenly at Whitaker's shoulder, asking permission to leave early. Edmund had one line in the stock scene and a brief exchange of sword strokes with Kent.

Fallon, feeling lax and tired, nodded agreeably at the actor. "A nice bit of dirty work in that last scene, Barney. You're getting that contrast between the true and the false to such a nicety that Edmund seems to be two different men."

Barney Sewell took the compliment with the back of his

shoulders, moving away. By the time Dan had discovered the location of Fallon's car Sewell was out of sight.

Dan had no great taste for what he was about to do. He wished there were someone available to go with him, but the rest of the cast were busy.

He found the car in the small lot just outside the stage door, and with considerable reversing, clashing of gears, and nervous spurts on the old, slick tires, he got the big Hudson out of the alley and into the Main Street. He parked briefly outside the police station, but Willard Pruitt was not on duty.

Dan drove out Main Street at high speed. He did not see Tony Riordan on the sidewalk, going out. His suspicions, of course, could be all wrong. He swerved into a service station on singing tires, and phoned the hotel. Riordan was not in his room.

Dan drove hastily up into the hills. He passed the farmhouse where Mrs. McCall kept inquisitive look-out on her neighbours, saw the lonely light in the Morgan cabin, and drove on to the end of the street, choosing a side road beside a dirty, almost invisible sign: NO TRESPASSING.

It was a country road, leading to one of the city reservoirs. Dan drove up to the big iron fence, swung between two trees, switched off his lights, and sat looking down steeply upon the little cabin. After a long fifteen minutes by the luminous dial of his watch he saw a shadowy movement far down on the road from town. A man turned up the trail to the Morgan cabin, moving steadily toward the door.

As Whitaker slipped out of the car, treading softly on the leaves and the gravel and the slick pine needles, a familiar line came to his mind: "Thus, out of season, threading dark-eyed night. . . ."

Ethel Tucker started up from her couch at the first sound of scraping feet outside. There was a pause and then a rap on the door. She drew the robe across her

exposed throat, swallowed painfully, and moved on bare feet across the room. She stood beside the door, listening, until the second sharp rap, inches away from her ear, made her heart leap.

"Who is it?" she said and found that her weak voice would not penetrate the door.

Dan Whitaker had given her a queer warning, the other day, and now she did not know what to do.

If the door had a chain, anything like that—

There was a little window, high up on the wall beside the door. She stood on a chair and with an effort managed to pull down the upper sash.

"Who is it?" Her voice was a rasping whisper.

"Tony Riordan. Did I get you out of bed?"

"Oh—Tony. Are you alone?"

"Yes, I am. Do you mind?"

She was already climbing down from the chair. Her hand hesitated for an instant on the lock, but Dan Whitaker's warning seemed absurd when applied to the man outside the door. She pulled the bolt.

Tony Riordan stood shyly in the doorway. There was nothing menacing in the questioning half-smile on his lips. "May I regard it as a compliment that you let me in after you found I was alone?"

She only smiled and made a despairing gesture toward her throat.

"You have got it bad, haven't you? Get back in bed, if you like." She looked slightly startled, and he grinned. "I was thinking of your comfort."

"I'm feeling all right," she said with an effort.

"This is great," he said. "I come to have a chat, and the lady has no voice. I wonder what the army handbook would advise for this situation?"

She looked at him, self-consciously, aware that her hair fell loosely to the shoulders, that her face was extremely pale. She must look like a tubercular waif with her long thin neck and her sharp throat bones visible in the open gap of her robe.

God, she's lovely day or night, made up or not, he was thinking.

She held her hands in her lap, rocking, feeling too prim, grandmotherish. She could not think how to act. Society relied all too heavily on the human voice. Without it one was lost.

"Could I have a drink?" he asked, suddenly.

She nodded. "You mean—water?"

"What do you have?" He leaped to his feet. "Here, let me get it."

He moved into the kitchen with an air of easy authority. She heard the refrigerator door open and shut, a rattle of drawers, and presently he came out proudly bearing a foaming can of beer. She refused to join him, and he sat down again, sipping the beer gratefully. She managed, at some pains, to explain that Paul Enright kept the stock of beer in the house.

"Enright seems to have the run of the place," he remarked. Somewhat later his voice grew suddenly serious: "Ethel—"

She smiled, leaning forward.

He hesitated, slapped himself on the knee, and paced disgustedly around the room. "This beats me. A man can't evn get started. Does it hurt badly to talk?"

"Yes." She pressed her hand gently on her throat.

He stopped pacing and dropped a hand on her forehead, and the cold of his fingers made her jump nervously. He laughed. "No fever. You're not bedridden, then?"

"Oh, no," she whispered. "Not at all. I feel fine."

"Would a walk in the night air do you any harm?"

"Oh, I think n—" she began, then withdrew uncertainly against her chair, remembering the advice of Dan Whitaker.

"Yes or no?" he urged. "I can't just have you looking at me while I talk. In the dark it might not seem so one-sided."

She rocked in her chair, feeling a little silly.

"If you cannot say yes, Ethel, let me say it for you: Yes. . . . You know, as your interpreter, I might find this has interesting possibilities." He gritted. "Don't worry, though. I am too correct for my own good. If I lay a hand on you it will be by impulse, not design. Go get some clothes on. Or, if you prefer, don't."

She thought his smile was very disarming, but his sense of humour bothered her. It was just parlour talk, of course, but how would he be when he stopped talking? She set her mouth severely and looked straight at him. He wore a pair of grey slacks, white tennis shoes, and a loud plaid shirt with short sleeves. He was not big or dangerous, just—solid. There was not a single handsome feature about him, nothing too right, nothing quite wrong.

"All right," she said, hoarsely.

He went out and sat on the front step while she dressed. When she came out she switched off the light by habit, leaving the door unlocked.

Dan Whitaker, on the edge of the forest, leaning against a tall pine, sucking at a dead pipe, saw the lighted window suddenly go blank.

He roused to stiff attention, listening. He heard the unmistakable slam of a screen. The night, fortunately, was rather hazy. Some light from the town reflected against the overcast. He was just able to distinguish a dark pattern of motion descending from the cabin to the road.

Dan stepped down into the road, not exactly liking what he was doing, but excited at the prospect. The movement was away from him, so he followed at a considerable distance. The couple took a branch of the road which followed the crest of a high ridge before curving back toward town.

If he had not been so possessed with one idea Dan might have stayed where he was and waited, but there was an innate gallantry in this thin, gangling, moderately frail

scholar from Chicago which would not allow the girl, Ethel, to get out of earshot in the company of a single man.

Thus Dan passed beyond the open range of sight and sound surrounding the cabin about five minutes before another man came down out of the forest fifty yards to the east of the reservoir, not seeing the car that was parked there among the trees.

The movement of the newcomer was swift but not headlong, remarkably light-footed on the irregular broken slope. Like an exploring bear the man crept close to the darkened cabin and moved from window to window, listening. At times his head closely resembled an animal's muzzle, lifted, searching for subtleties beyond the ken of an ordinary man, for the breathless sounds, the impalpable evidence of good sensuously engaged with evil. . . .

The night air, heavy with the incense of the mountain evergreen, was good medicine. Ethel Tucker's head and throat had not felt so clear all day. She held Tony Riordan lightly by the hand, and speech seemed unnecessary—the night was so full of abundance here on the edge of the young wilderness approaching the maturity of autumn. She seemed to grow with the growth of summer, breathing deeply of the warm air.

Riordan was thinking about the single kiss in the costume room, about the promise to himself not to get beyond a kiss with any American girl. More than that meant complication, and the older he grew the more he tried to simplify his life. As an international tramp he had learned to be simple. He wanted to go on that way.

The worst of it was that he could not work the thing out at leisure. He spoke suddenly, deciding to reveal his problem: "My time is running short, Ethel."

Her silence was an unspoken question.

He had to go back to England in seven weeks, he told her. Damn short time to settle an international crisis!

She laughed, remarkably quick to grasp his meaning. He had intended never to get involved outside England.

Like most Englishmen, he had a kind of indulgent, parental affection for America, but he was not in love with it. He could never abandon "this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England," regardless of its future—

"I honestly believe, Ethel, that the old England may be dying, politically—dominant England, that is. Lord England. The man and the heart will still be there, but the titles and the great economic heritage will be gone. I look for a more vulgar, popular, unstable, dynamic civilization for at least a hundred years. Beyond that—well, let my children worry about that; but God, let my children's minds retain the best of England!"

They walked along the road in momentary silence, and Ethel thought what a strange use for a man to make of these surroundings. She could not imagine Loren Clift ever speaking or thinking this way. Loren was a citizen of space. Billy Lewiston might have thought like Riordan, but he could only be true to his ideals, not speak them. Billy had died without a voice.

Voiceless.

The pain in her throat made her suddenly choke up like a consumptive. Riordan's arm was around her waist, and her muscles convulsively hardened in his embrace, then relaxed, hardened and relaxed.

She tried to break from his grip. This was like being sick before a witness. It was not at all romantic.

He misinterpreted the way she struggled, almost ripping her skirt in her haste to be free. "Sorry," he said, hoarsely. "That was a crude beginning."

"It's all right, Tony. I lost my breath. I guess I'm not a very exciting companion."

"On the contrary—" he said, thinking of the hard, contracted, trembling weight of her against his arm, not liking the trend of his thoughts, not at all.

He took a step backward. Her slim, graceful, erect young body was fully visible, a perfect silhouette. "I could go on talking all summer and never get anywhere," he said.

"It's a strange experience, Tony, hearing a man make love to his country."

"I was being practical, not romantic. We are so many miles apart, Ethel."

"Miles? To me, it seems no distance at all." She moved closer and his face was quite visible. There was a startling intentness in the dark depth of his eyes, but it was too late to draw back for she was already in his arms.

For a moment nothing was important but his nearness. The inner warning was too remote to be heeded.

Riordan kissed her gently, not wanting to force his way beyond the tenderness that came so readily.

"If this is the wrong time, tell me," he said.

"This is the right time, Tony," She spoke with all the conviction of one who has firmly made up her mind, and still he hesitated.

"You seem to have recovered your voice."

"So I have." She laughed.

"I am the one having trouble with words," he noted.

"Not you, Tony. With all your experience?"

"Let's not go into that. The past is much too complicated."

"Is it? Tony? I suppose you would laugh at what I call experience."

He moved away, gripping her lightly by the wrists. "Let's not make that an issue, too. Not the difference in our years. Age has nothing to do with love."

"Love? Are we that far already?"

"Well, may I try?"

"Try, Tony. Oh, yes, you may try. . . ."

She was in his arms again and he was sure that this was exactly right, as it should be. . . .

Her lips slid across his cheek to his ear. "You wouldn't know, but this is against orders," she said.

"Orders?"

"I should not be alone with you."

"Whose orders?"

"Mr. Whitaker's."

"Whitaker?"

"He thinks I may be in danger."

Riordan stepped back, holding her at arm's length. She tried to explain, but the warning had never been very clear to her, except that he, Whitaker, did not want this disaster that began with Loren Clift to claim any more lives.

"Lives?" Riordan said. "Did you see or hear anything that might make you a dangerous witness?"

His hands were locked so tightly on her forearms that she felt suddenly weak and afraid. How could she be sure about any man?

"Let's go home—" she started to say, and her voice was gone.

Now she realized, suddenly, that the vocal condition was an emotional reflex. Something in her had gone completely rigid since Loren's death, locking the muscles of her throat, and the tiniest repetition of fear or doubt was enough to renew the paralysis.

She was frightened and afraid to admit her fright. It was like being trapped in a dark cupboard beyond the reach of sound, to have no voice for fear.

"Tony, come on," she said in a very weak whisper. She tried to express physically what she could not speak, reaching out hastily, pulling at him with a little convulsive tug of her fingers, and what she got hold of was not the man but his shirt. She could hear the ripping sound, the faint snap like a button being torn from its threads. She stood, gripping the loose flap of cloth, then foolishly, nervously tried to close the shirt front with her own fingers, unable to speak a word. The button was gone. It was a futile, ridiculous performance, undignified. She would have moved away from him, embarrassed and speechless, but his hands had closed on her wrists. An odd laugh escaped him. He took one of her hands and pushed it through the gap in his shirt, and she responded, unexpectedly, pressing her open palm against the firm

ribbed flesh. His heartbeat was there, live and warm, under her fingertips. He laughed again and freed her other wrist, at the same time circling her waist with an arm that was no longer gentle but strong and insistent.

She suddenly staggered back, throwing him off balance, and his weight came at her. She thought for a moment they would both go down in the road and the dust and the dry leaves, and that would be the end of everything—of respect, of love, maybe of life.

She was afraid but not terrified. She simply turned away from him, recovering her balance, walking rapidly, and his hoarse appeal came after her: "Ethel! . . . Ethel, wait—"

Riordan moved after her, but a half-dozen steps convinced him he was behaving like the clumsiest kind of fool.

What in God's name had possessed him?

He could hear the girl leaving the road, scrambling up the little path, slipping, slowing at last to a normal pace, recovering her self-control. He could almost feel her anger lashing out at him, bitterly.

Panting, disgusted with the general progress of the evening, Riordan walked slowly down the road. Among the trees at his left he saw a movement, a melting blend of shadows. Instantly wary he stopped, hands clenched, and his violent self-contempt found a welcome outlet.

Angrily, he stalked across the road as one shadow detached itself from another, distinguishable now as a crooked pine tree and a running man.

3

Dan Whitaker had no desire to be heroic, now that the girl was safely out of it, but Riordan was on Dan's back in three swift bounds. Dan went down, crashing against a dwarf pine in a slapping, choking fury of boughs. He

hated most to be caught this way, from behind, not even to have the dignity of facing his enemy. Arms locked his waist; the man's weight crushed down on him.

Dan knew instinctively that he must not give the hands time to reach his throat. His toes dug into the loose earth, and he drove frantically ahead with his legs, like a starting sprinter, bucking and weaving. He lost balance, and their combined momentum carried them over and over, along the ground, kicking and straining. Dan felt his trousers rip and a sharp stone cut into his knee.

There was a latent strength in Whitaker's wiry form that would be a handful for any man, but his capacity for sudden giddiness when revolved at high speed was going to defeat him. He could not keep his sense of direction. The night was a vast, sickening cartwheel and Dan felt the instant's flash of horror, the recognition of death, that a man must know sinking into a bottomless whirlpool.

He said something, snarling, involuntary, and this monstrous bug on his back rolled over and lay quiet. The arms miraculously loosened him. Dan rolled off the hard belly of the man and crouched, swallowing air, ready to run, but fearing his reeling senses might pitch him headlong into a tree.

"Whitaker!" panted Tony Riordan from his prone position. "I had no idea—"

The two men rose unsteadily to their feet. Riordan slapped the dust from his clothing. His voice was apologetic: "Ethel said you had warned her of danger. I saw you there in the dark and decided to move first."

Whitaker was doubled over, clutching his stomach, breathing long and deep and painful breaths, trying unsuccessfully to bring up a coherent word, like a pump handle drawing rusty gasps from an empty well.

"Smart girl," he finally managed to say, standing slowly erect. "Out of all the available men in this town she chooses to consort with the most likely."

"Likely what?"

"Likely to endanger her life."

Riordan was astonished. "I? How?"

"You should know how. You were there. You found the boy in that hole."

"Clift? You mean Loren Clift?"

Carefully, at a great expense of wind, Dan tried to explain that Riordan was under suspicion in the Clift case. The man simply could not believe it, which struck Dan as a good sign. A guilty man, even an actor, would not appear so utterly confounded at finding himself the prime suspect in a crime.

Riordan's savage assault on Whitaker, far from proving his guilt, was almost an exoneration. Ethel Tucker had passed along a warning, and Riordan had acted upon that warning spontaneously and bravely.

Whitaker's numb hand traced over the hole in his trousers and the burning bruise on his knee. "This is what I get for applying my legal talents to a non-fictional crime," he said. "Henceforth, imagination is out! I shall be a humble devotee at the feet of Policeman Willard Pruitt. He advised me you were not a criminal type."

"Well!" Riordan said. "I shall have to buy Pruitt a drink."

"Pruitt is strictly a coffee man."

"Then I'll buy you a drink. Say—the girls have a stock of beer up at the cabin. Would you be interested?"

"An inspiration!" Dan sighed. "A beer may serve to unravel me. Not to mention the medical requirements of one mangled kneecap. Carry on!"

Dan threw his arm around Riordan's neck, and they climbed the hill, weaving, like a pair of taproom brawlers who had suddenly discovered a vast mutual affection in their hearts. . . .

At the Shakespearian theatre, rehearsal was ending. Ollie Van Horn, deciding he would not be a welcome extra at the Morgan cabin tonight, offered his car to Paul

Enright. Paul drove away with Glory's red hair streaming in the wind, unaware that Mitchell Fallon looked after them and shook his head in a gesture of grave and weary contemplation.

Dan Whitaker raised his beer can in a toast: "To Riordan, Anthony. To Gloucester, Edgar—the legitimate." He drank deeply and walked a trifle unsteadily across the room. "Legitimate Edgar, I must have your hand."

He grasped Riordan's fingertips and snapped them in a parody of a handshake.

Riordan smiled, wondering if Whitaker could become drunk on a few somersaults. "The correct line," he said, "is 'Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.' "

Whitaker sank into his chair with a pleasant sigh. "Oh, we'll have that, too, in our time, Englishman. I look for England to beat Hawaii in becoming the forty-ninth state."

Riordan decided to take that good-naturedly.

Whitaker patted the beer can and seemed to observe for the first time the silent unsmiling girl in the rocking-chair. "Do you realize, Miss Tucker, that Tony Riordan has just proved to my satisfaction that he is reliable, honest, courageous—athletic—and, best of all, he's on our side!"

Miss Tucker kept her slim hands folded in her lap and made no comment on what Riordan had proved himself to be.

The man who stood watchfully at the crest of the hill found the events of that night unexpected and bewildering. After his circuit of the cabin he had returned to the protective nightshade of the forest, where he sat at the base of a big cedar, ripping off long strips of bark which he slowly tore to bits. His gummy hands, touching the ground, came up with little clinging bits of dirt and leaf and mould.

He had been all right now for many days. At times his heart was so full of sympathy that he wanted to take each one of these unhappy souls in his great arms and tell them how it had happened, without pain. He had taken the agony of man into his own hands and washed it carefully away.

Tonight, he was not so sure of himself. The little waitress downtown had troubled him with the softness of her arms and the fullness of her breasts. He could shut his eyes and see a frightful shrinking and yellowing of the flesh, a hideous ageing of the face. Whoever she might be, waitress, actress, tall or short, dark or fair, he could take the young girl-image and wither it cruelly in his mind.

Looking down now at the unfolding drama of the night he saw the slim, unmistakable figure of Ethel Tucker returning alone to the cabin, the lights coming on. He heard distant sounds of struggle and finally two men staggered boisterously up the path and were cautiously admitted at the door.

He might have turned away, his curious mind restless and unsatisfied, if he had not heard the approach of a car climbing in second gear. It swept suddenly around the lower curve of the main road and stopped at the foot of the path. The lights remained on briefly, throwing white dusty streaks across the mountainside, elongating the tall clean bodies of the pines.

The headlamps switched off, leaving a sudden visual vacuum behind. Later, it was possible to see that the machine was an open convertible sedan. Once a girl's laugh rang out delightedly, followed by a silence more complete than before.

The watcher on the hill, out of a confused girl-image, tall, slender, plump, blond, red-haired, pale, white, pink, young, chaste, was slowly creating a single identity. He concentrated upon it now to the exclusion of all other sight and sound and feeling. Without knowing that he did so he had moved to a position of better visibility, had

thrown one arm around the smooth trunk of a young birch. As the time slowly passed, unbroken by a single voice or detectable movement, except those sensual disturbances in his own mind, his arm locked tighter and tighter about the tree, the muscles swelling, the knuckles of his hand growing large with strain until each was a separate, bulging knot of pain.

4

Since Sunday was a free day for picnics, mountain trips, swimming, or even—in rare cases—for rest, Saturday night was generally regarded as party night.

On this Saturday, the last week-end before dress rehearsals, Paul and Glory Enright volunteered to lock up the costume room. It was known that the student watchman would be out late, so special care was taken to be sure that equipment was stored and padlocked. An agile thief could easily have scaled partitions and made his way by the rafters into almost any room in the theatre, but costumes were not a very likely prize for an ambitious prowler.

Paul heard the lights going off at the main switchboard. Glory hastily hung the last few gowns on one of the crude portable wardrobes and rushed to reach the door before the vanishing lights could trap her in the dark, but she found herself trapped instead in her husband's arms.

"Stick around, baby girl, we'll have the place to ourselves."

"Paul, no."

"Paul, yes."

"All out!" the electrician shouted, and the last light went out.

Paul held Glory in his arms while heavy steps sounded across the boards of the stage, a door slammed, and an unearthly quiet blanketed the theatre.

Their voices were muted, hesitating to disturb that pitch-black silence. Glory was not pleased at all.

The problem of sharing each other's time had multiplied since Paul was asked to take Loren Clift's place as Prince John in the *Henry* play, rehearsing on alternate nights with *King Lear*. He had not seen Glory alone all week, and now he found her a rigid, unrelaxed woman in his arms.

Now, he said, she might have some idea of what a pair of tramps they would be as soon as her mother arrived from the east, forced to snatch their love in darkened doorways, under the trees, in the back seats of borrowed cars. That was all right for courtship, but he, Paul, was not just a gentleman caller, not any more.

Glory refused to be persuaded. She was afraid to be here, she admitted finally. Ethel Tucker had been warned to avoid going out with one man, alone. That was the reason for the numbers of men around her. The warning might apply to anyone who grew careless in the dark.

Paul was not particularly proud of his nerve, but he could not convince himself that there was danger here in this old storeroom, stuffily smelling of oils, greasepaints, lacquers, and dyes.

Glory's restrained feelings suddenly gave way: "Paul, I won't make love to you here!"

She instantly clapped a hand over her mouth, but the words echoed shockingly throughout the theatre.

She leaned against him, weeping, and his hands caressed her tenderly. After that single emotional outburst he found her soft and warm and pliant. Lightly, he kissed her eyes and her hair. "Do you know what I mean now, darling?"

"I know what you mean. Nothing is right, if we're not together."

"We're together now."

"Yes, Paul, yes."

While they clung to each other a loud creak came up out of the theatre, exactly like the shifting of a human weight upon one of the great throne chairs.

Paul was sure it meant nothing. Every quiet place has its movements and it sighs. To reassure her he crept to the edge of the uncompleted floor and, kneeling, thrust his head down into the room below. It was a dizzy, grotesque experience to see that roomful of strange stage properties upside down, the walls lined with dangling armour like rows of chained and lifeless prisoners. A big chair resembling some instrument of medieval torture seemed to be surmounted by a head that lolled gruesomely on a broken neck. The head, he decided, might be a helmet hanging on a chair post, but when he came back to his wife he found his only desire was to guide her down the stairs and get her out of this lonely haunted place.

"I will go home with both of you," Ethel Tucker said, firmly, setting down her empty coffee cup.

Ollie Van Horn spun twice around on his stool and grinned triumphantly at Tony Riordan. Ethel went out the door, comfortably and safely, between the two men. Saturday was dress night, and both of the men wore white shirts and blue bow ties. The girl was trimly dressed in light green neatly matched with suede shoes.

When the three were wedged into the front seat of his convertible, Ollie sighed. "Why is it I never get next to you, Tucker, but I find my hands attached to a steering-wheel?"

"Let me drive," Riordan suggested.

Van Horn questioned the qualifications of a European for American driving. "I don't want to meet a logging-truck on the wrong side of the street," he protested.

Riordan noted that Ethel seemed to draw a very precise line of demarcation between himself and her. "I drive either style, Ollie."

"Forward or backward?"

"Right—" Riordan said and a fraction of a second later remembered to be English—"ho."

"Ho, ho, right-ho, he says," Van Horn mimicked.

"The man has a whole world of accomplishments. I guess I'd like to see how they drive in Europe. Here, take the wheel—"

Van Horn tugged at the steering shaft as if to rip it out by the roots.

"It might be simpler to change seats," Riordan said.

Ethel Tucker's shoulders were bearing the brunt of Ollie's antics. "I hope you two boys are having fun," she remarked, dryly.

"If Van Horn comes along with us this could go on all night," Riordan complained.

"Get out," Van Horn said. "Meet me in ten seconds back of the car, Englishman. The one that comes back, Tucker, belongs to you."

"Right-ho!" Riordan said, lifting his heels and vaulting over the door to the sidewalk.

Ollie, trying the same leap, hooked a heel on the door hinge and went down in a scrambled heap.

"Oh, Ollie—" Ethel peered anxiously down at the fallen man.

Riordan laughed. "Another European trick I should teach you, Ollie."

Van Horn came up, limping, and met Riordan at the rear of the car. "You realize, Tony," he said, "I am fighting you with a broken leg."

Riordan gripped Ollie severely by the rolling fat of his upper arms. "You are fighting with a double handicap, Ollie, but I won't mention the other one." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Let us have the car for tonight, will you? This is vitally important."

"Vitally?" Ollie considered the word, grinning at the seriousness of Riordan's expression. "If it means the future of England—"

"It means the future of one Englishman, Ollie."

Ollie strolled away with a generous wave of his hand. "Thanks, Ollie. . . ."

The walk home was a delight. Paul and Glory held

hands, strolling up the mountain road, a steeply slanting grade of oil and dirt, beyond the last street light, where the pines were like tall bayoneted sentinels attending them, the king and the queen.

When they were far up into the forest Glory turned suddenly and clutched at his sleeve. He leaned down quickly and kissed her, but she seemed cool and unaware.

"Paul," she whispered. "Listen."

Behind them somewhere a stone, disturbed, had gone rolling down the hill.

"Animal," Paul said.

"It's terribly dark."

"It's beautifully, wonderfully dark. May I make love to you here?"

"Paul, this is a public road."

"Wherever you are, that's the place to make love."

"Oh, honey, come on." She gave a little urgent tug on his arm.

Paul was still too impressed by the magic of the night to sense any of its more subtle warnings. He tried to walk slowly, but her nervousness finally aroused him and he began to stride more rapidly. They came to where the road branches, right towards the cabin, and left toward the nearest living neighbours.

"Paul, I'm sure," she said. "There's someone behind us."

"It's a free road."

"It's not like that, Paul, not just anybody out walking."

"Why not?"

"Because if it was we could really hear them," she said. "No one can walk normally without being heard."

There was some logic to what she said.

"Why would anyone come creeping after us?" he argued.

"Oh, Paul, that word—*creeping*. Did you have to say that?"

"Hey, you started this, baby!"

"Come on!" she said, squeezing his hand so tightly that the nails pierced his flesh.

This time he was content to move at a pace that was just short of a run. In a moment they stood at the bottom of the path below the cabin, excited but relieved. They were lucky, Paul remarked. No lights, nobody home.

They took one look back along the road and scrambled rapidly up to the cabin. Glory found the key under the mat. "You go in," Paul said. "I'm going to sit out here for a minute."

"Do you think—"

"I don't know, honey. You might leave the lights off for a while. Go fetch us a beer, if you can find some in the dark."

Paul saw or heard no more from the quiet shadowy road below him, until a car came choking up the long grade, crested the curve, and its lights swept down across the little mountain glade. Paul leaped instantly to his feet, for he had seen in those lights, a hundred feet down the slope, the hunched shape of a man vanishing in a swirl of green boughs. . . .

Riordan made no move to stop the car below the cabin. He kept going until he found the dusty track running off to the reservoir. Ethel sat stiffly beside him and said nothing. He drove up to a little open spot where Dan Whitaker had parked the other night and stopped the car in a swirl of fine dust. The girl coughed and combed her fingers through her long hair.

"Right next door to the primitive," he said, wondering if she would think that was where he belonged.

She looked away, not answering.

There was just enough light to see the chain links of the big steel fence. "The fence spoils it, I'm afraid. Everywhere in this country you find fences." He was producing innuendoes without intending to. He pointed up at the strands of barbed wire along the top of the

fence. "What are they trying to keep out—water-thieves?"

"Deer, I suppose," she said without enthusiasm. "They get thirsty. They might jump in and not be able to jump out."

"And no one wants unpreserved deer meat in his drinking water."

"Don't talk like that, Tony, please, or I'll never want to take another drink."

"I must make a note of that trait, darling—squeamish: do not discuss death and decay at the dinner table."

"That's an awful word—squeamish."

"It's onomatopoetic."

"What?"

"It sounds like the thing it names. Squeamish, shuddery, shivery, squishy-screamy."

"Oh." She looked off thoughtfully at the shivering haze above the treetops. "What kind of a word is 'darling'?"

"Inadequate," he said.

"Oh—"

"Though I find it infinitely superior to 'Tucker.' "

The low laugh seemed to release some hidden spring in her body, and she turned on the seat, facing him, relaxed. "Poor Ollie," she said. "He's everybody's boy friend, but he doesn't know how to please a girl."

"Who does?" he said, and slipped an arm around her shoulders, his hand gripping lightly on the bare curve of her arm, pulling, not hurrying, with infinite care. She came against him, half resisting. She was too far away, their relative positions too awkward, for their lips to meet. His arm tightened, drawing her head down until he held her pressed against his breast. Her ear, cushioned by the soft tangle of her hair, could hear the distinct, regular heartbeat and feel his silent breathing, the life force, rising and falling, the ebb and the flow. . . .

The man Paul Enright had seen disappearing into the brush had moved higher on the mountain, circling away

from the reservoir to a point above and east of the cabin. He stood now in a position to command the entire glen. He was not able to see Enright seated at the door of the cabin. His eyes instead rested on the dark, unlighted windows. His right hand opened and closed. In imagination the hand traced over the naked glass of a window, and then it seemed to become some cruel force apart from himself, a huge male fist, smashing through the window, smashing....

"Paul, aren't you coming in?"

Through the veil of the screen Paul could see only the finer dimensions of her, shapely, feminine. "Wait, honey...."

It was Tony Riordan and Ethel Tucker who had driven up the road. Paul had recognized them vaguely by the dashlight—not their faces, but their silhouettes. The car, parked up there, was wide open to secret observation or to open attack.

Attack? In spite of the queer circumstances of Loren Clift's drowning physical danger seemed very remote from this friendly, good-natured group of actors. Except for Dan Whitaker, no one seemed to be looking for trouble. Dan was getting to be something of a joke, the way he was running around with the police.

Paul felt a little tremor of relief pass briefly across his shoulders. It could be a policeman out there now. That was the way these things were done—protective surveillance.

He gave up the problem with a shrug and went in to take his wife into his arms. She was all soft and ready for him now, relaxed, unwatched, unseen and unashamed.

The man on the hill was shaken with indecision. His imagination could not dwell at once upon the cabin below and the car above. Big as he was, his heart could not encompass the whole night. The cabin had become the focus of his formidable concentration, but the car

was immediately at hand, easily observed. The hands swung from his arms in perfect balance, right and left. Even the hot summer wind failed to lend an impetus; not a leaf stirred; the decision was suspended.

"I am sorry, Tony," Ethel Tucker said. "I was acting like a child the other night."

"Modesty is a rarity these days, Ethel. Don't ever lose it."

"If I had been the one, not you—if our actions had been reversed," she whispered, "then you might call me immodest."

He laughed, twisting his fingers through the strands of hair that lay along her cheek. "A little matter of physical differentiation."

"If I had done it, Tony, you could be sure of me then. I'm a single-minded gal. One man, one life."

"That's a rarity, too." He sighed. "I have only five weeks more. Is that time enough?"

"Tony, I don't know. Do you understand what I've been through?"

"Were you in love with Loren Clift?"

"How can I say for sure? I knew him so briefly."

"My time is as short as his, Ethel."

"Don't say that!" She looked about at the awesome height of the forest. "You'll live for ever, a man like you."

"I am speaking of our time together, not my rather negligible lifetime," he said dryly.

"You make it sound as if the decision is all mine, Tony. What about you and England?"

"I'm afraid 'this precious stone set in the silver sea' seems less precious tonight under your American moon."

Modesty was a fine thing, he thought, but a handicap to a man in a hurry. He was conscious of the roughness of his hand on the bare curve of her shoulder. He could see the graceful lines of her long legs. Her knees pressed against him. He reached out for her, clumsily, and she

laughed and came sliding toward him, bringing her face up to his own. . . .

Paul Enright raised the window shade, letting in a grey, indefinite radiance that fell across his wife's face and throat and the dark disarray of her hair against the pillow. The cloud ceiling was suffused with a dim silvery luminosity, as if the moon lay just beyond the mountain.

He wondered if fear had made up his mind, if he had come inside because of Glory or because it was easier to ignore his responsibility.

"Honey, I'm going out."

"For heaven's sake, where?"

"Tony and Ethel are parked up by the reservoir."

"Well, let them be."

"You were afraid for us, Glory. How about them?"

She seemed unable to answer that for him. It was really his own decision.

"Honey, I'm going—partway. I can yell up at Rordan."

"All right, Paul, if you think you must."

"I must."

"Paul." Her arms came up, and her body strained to reach him, veiled in darkness. He knelt beside her. She held him tightly, fiercely. "Paul, if there's any sign of a man you run. I want you to run. . . ."

At the bottom of the hill, Paul turned to the right, taking the middle of the road. He had gone no more than fifty feet when he took a precautionary look backward. To his horror there was something above and behind the cabin which did not belong there, crouching, the shape of a rock or a shrub, but he could remember neither on that open, grassy slope. . . . Glory. Alone. . . . He took a running leap at the steep bank of the road, scrambling with hands and knees and feet, not thinking of quiet, only of the necessity of getting between the cabin and the man. He ran straight up the hill, with less and less assurance, finally kicking at the thing in disgust. It was only a

bush, after all. He might have known a man would not scout around so openly.

He stood erect in the open field, breathing heavily from the rapid climb, his eyes straining to penetrate the rows of trees on both sides of the meadow. At least his noisy movements might serve as a warning.

With hands that were reasonably steady he searched his pockets for a cigarette, found one, got it into his mouth; and lit it. He flipped the match into the dust, feeling tall and young and capable of action, self-satisfied. Coolly, unhurried, he turned to face the very top of the hill, the cresting sweep of the forest. . . .

There was a man, standing motionless, about ten feet back among the trees. It must be a man. Something in the spread and poise of the body was contrary to any other shape but man's.

The cigarette felt dry and tasteless in Paul's mouth. He threw it on the ground.

He rubbed the back of his head, as if that somehow might induce clarity of thought and vision.

He realized now that he was afraid—not with a normal everyday fear. This was unreasonable—paralysing. Loren Clift had died alone, in silence . . . Loren. The dangling, limp, drowned horror of the boy crushed lifelessly in that tunnel . . . the driving, strangling reality of the chill water, strong as a man, rising to his waist, higher . . . the experience of death . . . he knew all about it, he had been there.

“Paul, I want you to run. . . .”

Glory, the cabin, safety were such a little way behind him. He could run, if he had to, like a wild deer.

He did not run. Instead he leaned down, groped around in the dust and found a small rock. He threw it at the motionless figure, aiming high, so that it went whistling through the lower limbs, struck a tree and glanced off, scurrying at last along the leafy ground like a frightened squirrel.

The man, if it was a man, did not move.

Paul walked up to the very edge of the trees. There was not over thirty feet of distance between himself and the shape he had taken for a man. "What do you want?" he said in a voice that was not even recognizable.

Appalling silence came back at him.

"Paul!"

Oh, God! He swung around. Glory was running up the hill, her silk housecoat giving her a strange winged look as it streamed behind her pale legs in the dim half-light.

"Here!" he shouted, finding his normal voice.

She ran to him, out of breath, unable to speak for a moment. His arm came around her and he felt the renewal of courage that comes with companionship, however helpless it may be. He faced the trees defiantly.

"Paul, I saw you," she managed to say. "You scared me, darling, chasing around the cabin that way. I couldn't stay in there alone."

"Oh, baby, baby," he said, hugging her with a tremendous protective affection.

He thought of asking her to look up into the trees and tell him he was seeing ghosts, imagining men where they did not exist, but that would only frighten her again.

"Paul, come back to bed," she said, appealingly. "Don't leave me alone."

He took her hand and faced down the hill. It may have been instinct that called him back, or it may have been her trailing gown that diverted his attention, snagging on a shrub so that she almost walked completely out of it, naked in the moonlight. Whatever the cause, he turned back in time to see the man-shape moving forward through the trees.

He tore the gown free and fairly threw the girl down the hill with a desperate sweep of his hand, shouting incoherently, "Run—Glory—"

He could not even think of a sensible defence. He just went charging into the trees with his fists, his shoulders, and his head, anything to put time and space between them—the man and the girl.

The momentum of attack went, confusingly, in his own favour. He struck the man, stunningly, in the chest. The impact sent Paul to his knees, and the man staggered back against a tree. In the instant's pause the man's deep, choked breathing was audible. The sound would have been less terrifying from an animal. Paul looked over his shoulder and saw Glory halfway to the cabin.

"I want you to run, Paul. . ." and he did run, leaping, stumbling, leaping again. The breath whistled in his throat. He caught Glory with his arm, lifting her by the waist, the weight of his rush almost hurling them both to the ground. She ran with him, sobbing, and his hand clawed down the screen, found the handle, pulled. He whipped her past him into the cabin, without even looking back, got the door shut, his shoulder crowding it, the bolt snapping home.

Glory was down in a heap on the floor, and Paul was on his knees, shivering. It all came out of him now, not a sound, but a dreadful sickness of fear that left him helpless and shamed before his wife.

"Tony, take me home."

"So soon?"

"Oh, Tony, I must go, I must. . ."

The way she clung to him was such a complete contradiction that he laughed outright.

The moon had achieved the top of the obstructing mountain, and its rays came down in delicate webs of light through the tall pines. A passing beam fell full on Ethel's head, glistening on her hair, framing her face, lips parted, half smiling, the eyes like a sleepy child's, the slender nose casting a proud shadow the length of her cheek, a blend of pale innocence and mysterious midnight shadings too delicate for any artist to capture.

"You darling, you beauty," he said. "I agree, you must go home."

Neither one, however, would give up the other, and

the moon crept higher, bathing the whole car with a phantom light.

Paul Enright saw the bright moonlight penetrating the cabin windows. He rose, shakily, and groped noisily in the kitchen through unfamiliar cupboards.

He came back slowly, dropped to the floor beside Glory, and laid a heavy weight in her lap. Her fingers traced the cold outline of a hammer.

"If he comes use that."

"Paul, you're not—"

"Tony and Ethel can't be out there with that man, Glory. They can't." He was arguing as much with himself as with her, hating the weakness that had left him broken and unworthy on the floor.

Glory shrank back from her husband, sensing the futility of argument. He forced himself to get up and walk to the door. It took a full minute for his nerveless fingers to slide the bolt.

"Lock it," he told her, hoarsely. "Don't open, except for me."

He went out quickly before fear could suck him back into that unspeakable vacuum.

He found himself in the road, the wind warm in his hair, between two aisles of trees that seemed to have narrowed like the walls of a deep crevasse. He moved at a trot, not a run or a walk. His strength was all gone. If he could not finish this he was no good. It was like war, the real war, the battle, against fear, against nature.

Just short of the long fingertip shadows of the pines he paused. "Riordan!" he shouted, and there was no voice at all. He took hold of himself, and the next was a cry of unmistakable warning: "Riordan, get that car out of the woods!"

The headlights found him there, pale and wild-eyed, in the middle of the road. . . .

Tony Riordan's native composure was slightly shaken

when the cabin lights came on and he saw Glory sitting there so obviously and thinly gowned for the night.

"It's all right, we're married," Paul said with an odd drunken sound of triumph in his voice. He stood over his wife, pointing down with a long unshaking finger—"and we're going to tell your mother so. This nonsense is all over, Glory. It's done. Our marriage is going to be right."

Glory looked up meekly with two bright tears in her eyes. Her husband had grown very tall and very dominant in the extremity of this night.

PART SIX

I

IN THE SHADOW OF THE THEATRE WALL DAN WHITAKER watched the townspeople filing in for the first dress rehearsal. A big night. Free seats were not the only attraction. He knew why many of them were here, to observe and to wait.

Mitch Fallon's late decision to open with a comedy was an inspiration. The harrowing murders of *King Lear* compounded with the murder that walked the local streets might have set a permanent stamp of tragedy on this summer and all the summers to follow.

Officer Willard Pruitt worked his way through the crowd, sidling along, trying—it seemed to Whitaker—to keep the big gun on his hip from bruising the taxpayers.

Pruitt met the director and pulled him secretively behind one of the slender evergreens growing against the wall. "We got our men planted, Mr. Whitaker."

"Obviously, Mr. Pruitt."

The big man looked crestfallen. "Does it show that bad?"

"Mmm, well," Dan said vaguely.

"We've even got a man on the big light pole, acting like an electrician."

"Yes, I see. Just so he doesn't drop a wrench on somebody's head."

"He's got no wrench, Mr. Whitaker."

"Well, that's a realistic touch. I hope that amateur you have in the make-up room can look a little more authentic."

"He once did a policeman's benefit show."

"Great, great. All he has to do is stand back, close one eye, purse his lips, and nod his head. Just see that he keeps his hands out of the grease!"

"Yes, sir. He won't touch a thing." Pruitt started toward the gate.

"Willard," Dan called.

They faced each other in the lengthening shadows of the evening.

"Are we right or are we wrong?"

"Mr. Whitaker, we don't know. We just don't know. Was he going for Enright or Enright's wife, the man or the woman? Answer me that and we got something. Meanwhile, we keep the boys and the girls apart, with an especially sharp eye on the girls—strictly in line of duty, of course."

"And what if our diabolical playmate decides that he likes little boys all by themselves?"

Pruitt threw up his hands.

At the right rear of the stage Glory Enright led her husband into a dark alcove. In costume he was the tallest and handsomest of all, she thought.

"Paul, the rules say a girl can't be alone with a man any more."

"Is that why Mitch called the meeting in the dressing-room? I guess they really took my story to heart."

"How much did you tell them, Paul?"

"They wanted to know how you were dressed, honey, when you came up the hill." His hand came up swiftly to stifle the horrified gasp on her lips. "Whitaker thought that your coming out of the cabin must have excited him in some way. They wanted to know just what about you was exciting, as if I could put that into words."

"Paul, you didn't tell them—"

"About almost disrobing yourself on that bush? Yes, I'm afraid I did."

"You were certainly co-operative, weren't you?"

"Baby, it's all right. This is a terrible thing."

"Do they think it is one of our—"

"They don't know. There are people who get—well—strange ideas about stage actors."

"Paul, I'm scared. It could happen again."

He slipped an arm around her shoulders. "Not to us," he said. "Next time we'll be ready. You stay with other people, Glory, lots of people."

"You too."

He escorted her out to the audience and returned, climbing the stairs with his hand clamped firmly on the rapier hilt, to the dressing-room where Tony Riordan and Barney Sewell worked silently on their bearded faces.

For the first of the comedies Ethel Tucker was costume mistress. There were always last-minute repairs, ripped seams, and lost buttons. For an hour she had been busy at the sewing-machine. She had felt secure enough with that detective or whatever he was in the make-up room. Now the five-minute call was on, and the room became pleasantly quiet. She was shielding her eyes with one hand resting on her elbow, when Tony Riordan spoke softly from the doorway. "Worn out?"

She brushed a long strand of hair away from her eyes. "I've so much to think about, Tony."

"Sorry I interrupted."

"You did not interrupt, exactly. I was thinking of you."

"Am I that exhausting?"

She laughed. "Well, you're persistent."

"You've hit it," he said, good-naturedly. "I hear you've moved downtown now that the Enrights are legitimate."

"Yes, I'm back at the hotel. The—er—monthly rate is very reasonable."

He grinned at her effort to explain. "Good idea. Should save us a lot of time."

She smiled, no longer bothered by his directness.

"Same old room," she said.

He nodded, shaping the number with his lips: 507.

For a moment their hands reached out on the same impulse, pressing together, "Hello, neighbour," he said and ran down the balcony stairs.

She went back to her attitude of rest, and the pleasant nature of her thoughts became a dream; and later in the dream a human hand lightly stroked her hair. It seemed to her that this tenderness, multiplied by every fibre of the human being, was the essence of being loved..

But what was love?

She woke with a start, realizing that she was not alone. A man stood beside her, his thumbs tucked into the belt of his blue satin tunic. One of his sheer blue tights was drawn crookedly across the muscular knee, showing a long open tear at the seam.

"That looks terrible, Barney. That must be fixed. Herc, put your foot on my chair."

He nodded, his face obscured by a handsome grey beard. She found a blue thread and needle and stood beside him, working expertly at the seam.

Distinctly she felt again the impression of a hand passing along the waves of her hair, never quite touching it. She did not look up, not knowing what she would do if the hand were really there. She had worked with this man all summer, enjoying his modesty in contrast to the boldness of the others: it was impossible to connect him with that mysterious warning of Mitch Fallon's.

"There," she said, waiting for Barney to move back. When he did she straightened, smiling, made a few meaningless adjustments of the starched white ruff stiffly supporting his chin and beard. "There."

He did not say a word, and that was how he had been all summer, silent until speech was demanded of him.

"Well," she said, "is that all you want, Barney?"

His change of expression was astonishing. He seemed to break away by a violent physical effort, and she could hear his soft-clad feet on the stairs in unreasonable, stumbling haste. Looking into the depth of the stair-

well, she could see him pausing at the stage door, silhouetted, and beyond him the calm reassuring face of Mitchell Fallon.

She sat down and stared into a mirror at her thin face, summer-tanned, the long hair framing it neatly pouring down into the open throat of her blouse. Am I that provocative, she thought, without even trying? Being loved is easy, but what is it to love?

She passed her own hand down the length of her hair, feeling the subtle current of motion, again and again and again, drawing a delicate line between pleasure and doubt, until she forced herself to stop.

The rehearsal began on schedule, and Dan Whitaker came out of the business office behind the ticket office with a big bundle of papers under his arm. He found Officer Pruitt just outside the lower gate. "Pruitt, let's go down to your office."

The big policeman easily matched Whitaker's long strides. "I thought you was the director of this show."

"Not tonight. I can't do the actors any more harm than I've done already. Mitch says to keep working with you. Pomeroy has taken over for me."

At the police station a young patrolman was on night duty. He pressed a button to admit them to a small interior cage.

Whitaker spread his armload of files across Pruitt's desk. "You remember when we talked about the patterns of murder, Willard?"

"I'm way ahead of you, Mr. Whitaker. I've got police reports from everywhere. The thing is to sift them down." From a desk drawer he drew a large board on which he had tacked an ordinary road map of the U.S. The map bristled with beaded pins.

Whitaker noted that there were three colours—red, white, and blue.

"I'm looking for similarities," Pruitt said, expanding his chest, locking his thumbs on his belt. "The red is for

the same sex but a different method. We don't know if all these were crimes, but every unexplained male death goes up on my board in red. White pins are for same method we had here—drowning, but a different sex, female. The blue pins are for a double similarity, same sex, same crime. You get it?"

Whitaker nodded. He worked the pipe in his teeth to avoid laughing.

The big man pinched the crook of his nose. "You think it's funny?"

"No, but the psychologist in me tries to read some significance into your choice of colours—symbols, that is—red for the unusual crime, blue for the drowning man, and white for the woman."

"That was an accident." Pruitt shoved out his jaw. "But what do you make of it, Whitaker—white for the woman?"

Whitaker shrugged. "Respect, I suppose."

Pruitt was grinning. "I'll have to think that over."

"Don't worry about it, Willard. You're not under suspicion, but some of our actors are, and that's why Mitch wanted me down here. If one of our men is involved in this we want to get after him."

Pruitt sat at the desk, thumbing through the Festival personnel files. "Two of your men are already clear—Enright and Riordan. That leaves us how many?"

"About twenty-five—"

"—to worry about. I'm not sure Enright's description of the attacker's size is a good one. I been out there on the hill, and the shadows must have been tricky."

"Well, these files show where all our men have lived and gone to school, and their theatre experience."

Pruitt sighed. "It's just a gamble that we can match them with any of my pins, but it's worth a try."

"Can I help you, Willard?"

"You better stay with your boys and girls."

Turning to his fellow officer, Pruitt sent him up to the theatre to check arrivals and departures. The young

patrolman nodded very seriously and went out, strapping on his gun.

Bent over his desk Pruitt settled his heavy jaw on the ball of his fist and opened the first file. Dan Whitaker stood alone for a moment, staring at Pruitt's map. He was not smiling. Thoughtfully he selected a white-headed pin from the box on Pruitt's desk and stuck it into his lapel.

2

Three men were the first to get away after the rehearsal. The photographers kept only part of the cast for costume shots.

The three walked together because loneliness was a danger sign. Without being told they knew that an armed night watch moved silently through the town.

John Pomeroy, the director, would have been amused to know that his giant stature and his liteness of movement drew the sharpest attention from the guard at the stage door, overshadowing his companions, Riordan and Sewell. The guard did not guess how thoroughly alone the younger men were. Pomeroy, discussing tonight's comedy, was a dialogue unto himself.

In the all-night bus station opposite the hotel the three men ordered coffee. A half-hour later Ollie Van Horn's open convertible roared up from the square, lurching violently into the hotel curb. Ethel Tucker stepped to the sidewalk. Pomeroy, deciding to hail a ride, trotted across the street, and the car was gone in a brief midnight uproar.

The slim blond girl was alone on the sidewalk. She looked north and south. Her uncertainty was apparent in the way she opened her white leather bag and weighed something in her hand, probably a room key, before going inside.

Tony Riordan, not wanting to appear obvious, paid for his coffee and casually collected his change.

"Better get home myself," he said, nodding and smiling at the lone man on the end stool.

Ethel was brushing her hair before her bathroom mirror when the phone rang. She ran across the room thinking. "The man must be psychic."

"Welcome home," the voice said.

"Hello, Tony."

"How are you down there?"

"I'm fine down here."

"Can I come down?"

"No."

"I might have spared myself the question. This is going to present problems."

"I know, Tony. I've thought about it."

"Oh, you have? So you decided to make it as hard for me as possible?"

"Tony, listen—"

"Can't talk over the phone. It's no good. Could we go for a walk?"

"At this hour of the morning?"

"If that sounds unreasonable, remember, Ethel, that time is no longer in our favour."

"I understand. I—I'll meet you on the mezzanine."

"Ahead of you this time. I'm already there."

"But how—"

"A little trick I learned from a Hindu friend. Explain it when I see you. . . ."

In the bus station the lone attendant was engrossed in a paper-back novel, secure in the awareness of a loaded revolver under the counter. The town was alert.

Barney Sewell was conscious of the general tension, but it did not account for his own state of excitement. His coffee was cold, untouched. His eyes were fixed on the hotel, and he waited, contemplating the thing he was

about to do. Ten feet away was an open phone booth, and the means of communication, a dime, was squeezed tightly in the palm of his hand. He thought of the girl undressing for bed, lying there, her hand reaching for the phone, listening, pressing the receiver to her breast with the sharp surprise of recognition—his voice against her breast. Sewell shut his eyes, swaying with one of his attacks of vertigo, those unexplained gaps in consciousness, a kind of walking sleep that he often felt but did not dare to understand.

Opening his eyes he saw the hands on the station clock. With an effort he walked to the phone booth. He dropped the dime, and it made a shocking clamour in the box. He glanced over his shoulder, found the door of the booth tightly closed behind him. He was alone. His fingers found the dial "O" and twisted. He spoke the hotel number clearly enough, for "Hotel Cascade" came back to him in a flat male voice. He thought he would never get out her name. . . . "Miss Tucker's line is busy," the clerk said. "Will you wait?"

He dropped the receiver, and it took both hands to get it back on the hook. Yes, he would wait. All his life he had waited.

Riordan and the girl stood at a mezzanine window. He reminded her that any word above a whisper would echo throughout the lobby. He was pointing down at an angle. A man in blue jeans and open plaid shirt leaned against the corner lamp post, loading his pipe with tobacco. He had been going through this process of loading, never lighting it, for some time. He had a clear four-way view from the town's main intersection.

"But Tony, do you think it's wise to go out?"

"If that cop follows us it's as safe as anywhere, indoors or out."

"But if he doesn't follow us?"

"You underrated me," the Englishman said, slipping his arm around her, guiding her down the stairway to the

side door and out. The night clerk, bent over a big ledger, failed to hear the door closing behind them.

As Riordan expected, the lone guard on the corner saw them leave. He surveyed the perfect quiet of Main Street and decided to follow the couple, moving discreetly a hundred yards behind them.

Barney Sewell tried the phone again. He brushed aside the intervening voices with quick hoarse instructions, and heard the final nerve-tingling ring.

He would not be able to speak. The words would refuse to come, and then he would strike out in his helplessness, smash the glass, break out, and run away. . . . Second ring. The phone, of course, was not by the bed. It was out of her reach. She must be slipping out now, chilled in her gown, shivering, reaching the phone, lifting it in her warm hand. . . . Third ring. She must answer, she must be there. Fourth ring. She might be bathing. She might come dripping from her bath—”

He slammed the phone on its hook and stood there. . . .

He was surprised to find another dime in his hand again, hot in his hand.

He dropped the dime in the slot and dialled once more. The ring, in spite of his preparation, made him jump. He waited.

“Sorry, Miss Tucker does not answer. . . .”

He stood in the booth without motion, filling it wall to wall, scarcely breathing. The glass door steamed over with his breath, and he saw the movement of the clock hands through a hazy distance. Time and space were obscurities in his mind.

He could not believe the girl was gone. She had been there a few minutes ago, or her line would not have been busy. She had been in the room, and she was gone.

With a hoarse exclamation he threw open the door of the booth. After that, there was a long blank in his mind before he stood alone across the street from the hotel. The clerk could be seen through the lobby window,

hunched at the desk, head in his hands. He might have been reading, but there was something in the slackness of his shoulders suggesting sleep.

Sewell crossed the street, unseen by the man in the lobby. His hand quietly turned the knob of the side entrance, but the door was locked. He moved on to the rear and along the wall, peering up through the tantalizing web of the fire escape just beyond his reach. He staggered backward into the hotel parking lot. Tripping over a brick he took it up in his hand, wanting to throw it at a window, to interrupt, to disturb, to snap the inevitable chain of events that his troubled mind conceived. He could take any single window in the hotel and give it specific identity, galvanize behind it the encounter of the savage and the chaste.

The brick slipped from his fingers. He turned in his helplessness and wandered blindly through the night.

"Look, Tony." They had reached the crest of the highest avenue, which ran steeply above the park. Below them the interior of the walled theatre was cut in half by moonlight. Filled with strange shadows, the stage was like an artist's sketch in black and white.

"'An angel is like you, Kate, and you are like an angel.'"

"Kate?" she said. "I am no Kate!" She pulled away from him, and his arm slipped out to draw her back.

"No shrew, my dear, not you. I was addressing you as the Princess of France."

"Henry the Fifth?"

"I played Henry once—in Scottish repertory. The lines never seemed so right before. 'If thou canst love a fellow of this temper, Kate, whose face is not worth sun-burning, that never looks in his glass for love of anything he sees there . . . if thou canst love me for this, take me; if not, to say to thee that I shall die, is true—'"

"Don't quote me that, Tony. You'd never die for love, never."

He laughed, and his arm tightened on her waist. "You did not let me finish—'but for thy love, by the Lord, no; yet I love thee too.' "

"Unquote," she said, laughing.

"Ethel . . . that was for me."

She rested her chin on his shoulder and watched the distant dancing tips of the silver pines, a mystic ballet of moonlight and night wind.

"'Come,'" he continued softly, "'your answer in broken music. . . .'"

Then, as if the wind had come silently down through the trees, it seemed to take the Englishman's shoulders and sway him, gently.

She twisted away from him. "Don't—"

He stepped back, dropping his arms.

"Oh, Tony. I didn't mean—" Her hands came up, sliding around his neck. "I meant—" She leaned forward against his lapel, leaving the mood unexplained, mystifyingly.

"We'd better go home." His voice had lost its confidence. It sounded tired now, and defeated. "This is a lousy hour to be keeping a girl out."

With the poet's words he had tried to spin a mood, and she was not quite able to match it. She took his arm, guiding him down the steep avenue.

"Tony—"

How could she tell him what had really happened to her? He had created the wrong magic, taking her back to the arbour again—but she could not explain, and now the moment was lost.

Halfway down the hill they stepped into the middle of the street. Riordan kicked violently at a black rock, and it went rolling and leaping ahead of them. They stopped breathlessly and listened in fascination as the rock, gathering speed, ran away from them, out of control, bounding across an intersection and down on into the silence of the town.

Riordan tugged awkwardly at her hand, and the steepness of the street pulled them downward at an unnatural

pace. Blind to everything but themselves they turned toward the hotel, almost running, not knowing that they were recognized under the street light. Rushing on, neither would take the initiative to stop the other until they stood, unable to speak, at the very bottom of the hill, exhausted and dishevelled, caught up in a powerful force which both knew was more than a youthful flight down the mountainside.

She pressed her hand across his lips as if to capture what he could not say and ran ahead of him, rousing the hotel clerk.

Riordan, not moving, watched her through the window, climbing the stairs. A policeman seeing his wind-blown hair and the strange look in his eyes might have arrested him on the spot.

At the rear of the hotel, unseen by the deputy who came quietly down the hill behind the couple, Barney Sewell leaned against the bole of a tree, stunned by their entirely unexpected appearance out of the night. He had created a complex image of these two, irrevocably involved with each other, and the image was false. When he finally walked alone down the long hotel alleyway, Barney moved in a darker shadow than he had ever known.

3

On Mitch Fallon's new production schedule, *King Lear* was the second play. The house was packed, as if it were a show and not a dress rehearsal, when the curtain girl relayed the director's time signal:

“Five-minute call . . . five minutes . . .”

The man in the green tunic with black leather trimmings stretched the creases out of his pseudo-leather

boot, extending his toe, arching the foot, and running his hand up the inside seam like a woman straightening her stocking, past the knee and halfway up the thigh.

He strapped on his sword, straightened his shoulders, stepped into the vanity room, under the left balcony, where several mirrors offered a last minute self-inspection and faced the nearest mirror, patting the long sideburns and the sharp villainous point of his black goatee. Over his mouth was a fierce crescent of black beard. With his high, slanted eyebrows he looked distinctly Oriental.

Ethel Tucker was there alone, looking not over sixteen, dressed as Cordelia in a long white satin gown, belted just above the waist with a braided gold cord that matched the long golden braids of her hair, her light make-up accenting the red of the cheeks and the pallor of the throat.

In her hand she held a pair of scissors, performing extra duty as a last-minute expert on make-up. "Your beard is lopsided, Edmund."

He dropped on a stool that was too short for him, leaning back, his booted legs extended stiffly so that he half sat, half lay against a low shelf.

He closed his eyes. When they opened again, he found the girl's face bent close to his own while she minutely examined his beard. He could feel her breath falling warmly across his lips.

The dark curve of his mouth under the crescent beard opened to show the uneven white line of his teeth. The breath seemed to choke up in him, and he coughed twice, averting his face, before at last he spoke to her. "How old are you?" he said.

"I'll vote for the next president."

"Have you ever thought of marriage?"

The question was so stiff and formal and old-worldish that she almost laughed in his face.

Had she ever thought of marriage? She stood up straight and looked down at the heavy, tragic, Oriental face. Like Othello, he was . . . Othello and Desdemona. The black and the white. She had done Desdemona in

her undergraduate days. What a difference if this man had played Othello! She saw the large, smooth, brown hand resting curved in his lap and could not resist the thought of it, the jealous hand, encircling her throat, and as she looked the hand seemed to tremble, the fingers visibly closing.

She broke the illusion with a swift turning motion, dropping her scissors noisily on the shelf. "There, Edmund, you look—perfect." She added as an after-thought: "Who hasn't thought of marriage?"

She heard him moving off the stool, and there was a puzzling silence. A moment too late she thought of Mitch Fallon's warning. Turning, she might have tripped over the man, screaming, but his strength held her, and the scream was only a startled hesitation in her breathing.

Edmund was on his knees, blocking the narrow passage to the door. Without a word, he threw his arms around her waist and pressed his coarse-bearded face into the satin folds of her gown.

"Barney, please—" she managed to say, and there was no answer.

"One-minute call. One minute."

The curtain girl, Barbara, looked into the room and would have withdrawn with a curt "Excuse me," but she saw Ethel's arms outstretched, the dismay on her scarlet face.

"One minute to curtain," Barbara reminded in a caustic voice and went on down the line, crying her warning.

"Barney, you're on," Ethel pleaded. "Scene one—"

The arms loosened, and the man staggered to his feet. Sweeping past him, Ethel caught one glimpse in the big mirror of the dark, anguished smear of face and beard. "Barney, do something quick," she said from the doorway. "Don't go on like that."

Her appeal carried an unexpected kindness, and she saw him snatch up a hand mirror, fingers leaping to his eyes, expertly smoothing out the dark lines. Only the tremor

of his mouth under the evil beard showed an unprofessional emotion.

She ran down to the girl's dressing-room, where she was blessedly alone.

The lap of her clean gown was streaked with grease paint. Her hands, surprisingly controlled, took up a wad of Kleenex and carefully wiped away the brown stain.

" Mitch Fallon gave the down beat. The kettledrums in the shadow of the rear wall began a slow crescendo while two curtain girls, costumed like court pages, performed the ritual of opening the show. By the time the drums had reached a thunderous climax the big curtain was trembling with that breathtaking coming-aliveness, that last suspended instant of dimension between the world without and the world within. A quartet of trumpets accompanied the entry of Gloucester and Kent.

At the very height of the sound there was a splintering crash backstage. Mitch Fallon groaned and pressed his hands to his ears.

" I thought the king had more affected. . . ." Paul Enright was under the lights, striding, the sword poised at his hip.

Officer Willard Pruitt sat with Dan Whitaker in the outer circle of the audience. "Was that racket part of the show?"

"Amateurs, amateurs," Whitaker sighed.

"What was that?" said the sheriff's officer in the men's dressing-room, upstairs, helping Anthony Riordan draw out the handsome line of his eyebrows.

"Probably somebody driving his foot through a mirror," Riordan drawled. "I have had that impulse myself when a beard falls apart ten seconds before an entrance."

"Cordelia, my chuck, get in line," said John Pomeroy, gathering his train of courtiers just outside the stage door on the long silent grass.

"Who cracked a rib?" Ollie Van Horn shouted, falsetto from the rear of the line.

"Sounded more like a broken mirror," someone responded.

"A mirror?" Van Horn groaned. "Well, there go the best seven years of my life!"

"Shut up!" came down the line. "Here we go!"

"Where in God's name is Edmund?" Mitch Fallon's voice was like something torn out by the roots.

The Earl of Kent had made a casual sweep with his hand toward the pillar at stage left, turned his eyes, and found no one there. In that brilliant heat of performance which lifts even amateur actors to heights of ingenuity Paul Enright ad-libbed, "*'Is not this your son . . . approaching now, my Lord?'*"

"His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. . . ."

From the darkness at the far left a tall and swaggering Edmund appeared. He moved out of the shadows with exaggerated graciousness, bowing deeply when introduced to Kent. "*'My services to your lordship. . . .'*"

"I must love you, and sue to know you better." Kent's hand dropped on Edmund's arm and felt the muscle quivering violently under his grip.

"Sir, I shall study deserving. . . ."

"Note," Mitch Fallon whispered to an assistant: "Edmund asleep on cue."

King Lear came on with his train. He sent Gloucester and his illegitimate son to attend the lords of France and Burgundy.

Lear's voice was powerful, dominating. His proud gesture lifting the bowed nobles to their feet seemed to raise the level of the entire performance. "*'Meantime we shall express our darker purpose. . . .'*"

Backstage, the girl Barbara, sweeping the fragments of a mirror into a corner of the vanity room, looked up with a quick uncomfortable smile at the big black-bearded man filling the doorway.

4

“ ‘This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeit of our own behaviour—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are civil in, by a divine thrusting on . . . ’ ”

Mitch Fallon had leaped to his feet, frantically searching the audience. He found Dan Whitaker and beckoned with a sweep of his arm. Dan slipped down the aisle, silently.

“ ‘My father compounded with my mother under the dragon’s tail. . . . ’ ”

“Listen,” Fallon whispered.

Dan Whitaker looked up at the gloomy figure of Edmund, who stood with one foot on a bench, soliloquizing:

“ ‘ . . . so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous—Fut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. . . . ’ ”

Fallon angrily slapped his thigh. He pulled Whitaker down beside him, crouching in the aisle, whispering: “Dan, he did it again.”

“Did what?”

“Didn’t you notice? I worked with him for weeks to build that line. He drops the whole soliloquy like a clock running down. He’s not convinced or convincing, at all.

Go to work on him, will you? He respects you. Try to tell him what that speech means."

Whitaker nodded and glided toward the rear, waiting there for Edmund's treacherous deception of his brother and the final line:

"... Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:
All with me's meet that I can fashion fit."

Dan saw the girl dumping the broken bits of mirror into an ashbin by the stage door. He followed her into the empty vanity room.

"Off the record, Barbara," he said, "what's the story on the mirror?"

She busied herself, straightening the shelves. "Oh, it was Edmund, in here, right at curtain time."

"Edmund? . . . That explains why he was late on his cue."

"Yes, he was very put out," the girl said. When she heard the crash she had run in and found Edmund with his face in his hands.

Dan looked at the girl, contemplatively. "Show me how," he said.

She turned away, facing the corner where there were still some shining fragments of glass. Solemnly she bowed her face against her upturned palms.

"Did he explain?"

She faced Whitaker again, frowning. "No . . . I just hissed at him, 'Edmund on stage,' and he came rushing out with the strangest look. I can't describe it. Not contempt, exactly. He was just beside himself, Mr. Whitaker. I caught his arm and pushed him right out there into the light, and—it was like a miracle—he was Edmund. Just perfect." Her voice was lowered, softly. "He must be a genius, that man. I guess geniuses behave that way. They get awfully deep into a character."

"Thanks," Dan Whitaker said. He went out and stood looking at the slant of the dark stairway. He took a deep breath and went up.

Barney Sewell shared a triangular dressing-room with three other men. Tony Riordan was there with him now. Both men were busy with minor adjustments of costume, restoring their sweat-streaked make-up. Casually, Whitaker put a leg over the back of a folding chair.

"I am bothered by that last soliloquy, Edmund. 'The excellent foppery of the world.'"

Sewell looked at himself in his mirror. "I feel the lines are right. Aren't they projecting?"

"What do you feel about them, Barney?"

"Edmund is not speaking of the world apart but of himself as well."

Dan stared. "You mean Edmund believes in his own destiny by the stars?"

Barney considered that carefully before committing himself with a vague nod.

"Barney, no! The man is scoffing at the whole idea!"

"Wait, now wait," Barney said, and his dark eyes were shining. "Have you considered the end of the speech, the subtlety of it—'and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on!' The divine evil! By the stars! Predestined! It ceases to be evil, except in the eyes of man. By the divine conception, by pure inspiration, it is right!"

Barney was half out of his chair, sweat rising in little beads through the oily make-up. Dan drew away from him, mystified. "Barney, I think you're wrong," he said, sternly. He was aware that Tony Riordan had stopped smoothing his tights and was regarding them both with great interest. "However, Barney—right or wrong—there is no excuse for keeping it a secret. If Edmund regards his actions as excusable in the divine sight, let him shout it to the moon that he swears by!"

Dan could see the thought working back into Sewell's mind, taking hold. Dan relaxed, relieving the tension, and leaned against the wall, smiling. "One other thing, Barney. There's another line that you're losing for lack of force. It's a very important line."

Sewell tugged at his beard, setting it forcibly straight on his chin. "What line?"

They saw Riordan sliding through the door for his balcony entrance. "Edmund, get downstairs," he whispered. "Our scene is next."

Sewell cocked one ear for the distant lines from the stage and seemed to know instantly how much time he had. He stood up and deliberately, with skilled hands, drew the black boot tops high up against his crotch.

"This is the line, Barney," Dan said: "I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my—"

"That line deserves to be lost!" Sewell said, curtly.

"Lost? Barney, I don't agree. Why do you think that?"

The actor hesitated. He seemed already to be involved with the rapid lines on the stage below. He looked at Dan like a stranger. He went out the door, and Dan followed him to the stairs. Halfway down into the gloomy depths of backstage Barney turned back, his face visible in a downward stream of light, already assuming the twisted character of Edmund. As if drawing a memorandum from some quiet, remote pigeonhole of his mind and tossing it carelessly over the shoulder, he said: "Because it is not true...."

Dan Whitaker returned to the amphitheatre, breathing so stealthily on Mitch Fallon's neck that the man visibly jumped. "Mitch, I asked Sewell about that line, 'I should have been that I am—'"

"Well?"

Dan carefully repeated Sewell's comment.

Fallon shrugged. "Sewell has made quite a study of Edmund. He once wrote a treatise on this play."

"Mitch, I swear it was uncanny. I had a distinct impression that Sewell was speaking from *experience!*"

"Experience?" Fallon looked disgusted. "You don't mean Sewell thinks *he* is Shakespeare? A reincarnation?"

Whitaker laughed scornfully. "Mitch, be yourself."

Fallon scratched his head. "You mean Sewell has come to think he really is Edmund, the bastard? Self-identification—"

Whitaker slapped his friend roughly on the shoulder. "Listen, psychologist, when you and Mr. Freud get it all worked out, look me up. Meanwhile I have some business with Mr. Willard Pruitt."

Fallon stared after his spry and vanishing colleague. After prolonged thought a look of shrewd enlightenment passed across Fallon's face, giving way immediately to the old anxiety, to the lines of worry about the eyes and mouth. He turned to face the stage and drew his collar more tightly about his throat.

Dan Whitaker did not go directly to Willard Pruitt. To confirm his opinion he needed to talk with a man whose name had never been mentioned in connection with this case. Walking up Main Street to the Cascade Hotel, Whitaker used the public phone for a long-distance call. He sat down in the lobby to wait for an answer, giving himself a maximum time limit of one hour.

5

Mitchell Fallon's cigarette had gone cold. He had not moved since Whitaker spoke to him. The dress rehearsal was observed through a disturbing mist that had silently and coldly enveloped his mind.

On stage the violent climax was building. Action was timed to a split second. One actor out of line, out of step, could mean disaster. The *Lear* finale was always exhausting, but now this other thing—

Fallon sprang suddenly to his feet. Trotting backstage, he found Tony Riordan alone in a dressing-room, lacing his armour. There was not much time. Fallon helped with the laces, bending close to the actor's ear. "You

have a slight sprain in your wrist, Tony. No swords tonight."

Riordan stared at him.

"Do as I say," Fallon whispered. "Explain later. No swords. Play it for fun. I'll pass the word."

"Time to go, Mitch. I don't follow you. Barney's wearing his—"

"I'll get Barney's sword. Tell 'em you've got a bad wrist."

Fallon was gone swiftly down the stairs. He found most of the other actors in various stages of exhaustion outside the stage door. His demand for no swords in a dress rehearsal was an outrage, and the answer was a dumbfounded silence. He walked among the men, pulling weapons out of their scabbards, tossing them into a pile on the grass.

Ollie Van Horn broke the tension with a loud laugh. "This I have got to see!" he shouted, dashing for the nearest gate. "A duel with no weapons!"

Fallon smiled, directed the prop girl to sit on the swords, and followed Van Horn.

Out front the trumpets were sounding. When Fallon reached the pit Edgar was moving stiffly on stage, looking and feeling as clumsy as a steel robot. Through the opened visor he delivered his challenge. The duel with Edmund was played, shield to shield. Without swords it should have been hilarious, but Fallon saw that instead it was terrifying. The contestants strained together. The blows seemed deadlier for their silent invisibility, minus the ring of steel. This was an encounter of armoured ghosts. The circle of spectators, keyed to the mysterious pitch of the battle, lost its voice entirely.

This is it, Mitch Fallon thought. Here the summer had reached its crisis, now. By a miracle of intuition, not his own but Dan Whitaker's, he had solved it.

But was it solved?

Edgar, on one knee, recovered from a savage attack, and now the balance went to him. Edmund, staggering under

a slashing invisible thrust, struck a pillar. A woman's scream came, an instant late, and Edmund was down.

Mitch Fallon walked over to the gate and stared outward into the night. . . .

Lear and the Fool took the last curtain call.

"Cast on stage," Fallon shouted above the burst of applause. In spite of his troubles he observed with satisfaction the audience's reluctance to leave. *King Lear* was a show.

Behind the curtain the actors milled in semi-darkness. No one noticed the single armoured duellist who stepped quickly into the wings.

In the vanity room Barney Sewell hesitated, catching sight of himself in a mirror. He was breathing heavily, contemplating what he might say to Ethel Tucker, but she was not there. Of course she would not be, she was Cordelia, destroyed with her father by Edmund of Gloucester.

Edmund . . . but he was not Edmund, he was Barney Sewell, who had behaved foolishly with a girl. He must explain to her how it had happened. A man was not responsible.

Not responsible? He stared at the mirror as if the image there had spoken to him. He turned his back on the mirror, violently trembling. *Not responsible?*

A wild, unreasonable terror swept through him. He felt, if he turned back now, there would be no image in the glass at all. The prompter had left him.

Not responsible?

He moved toward the dressing-table, and the image moved with him in another glass, but its head was cut off at the shoulders, and he saw only an unrecognizable suit of armour.

A small white leather handbag was lying on the shelf. Recognizing it, he remembered where he had seen it before. Instantly he reacted. The bag was small enough to be hidden under his breastplate.

He walked quietly out of the room, undetected in the theft. Upstairs, the deputy on duty observed the lone actor stripping off his uniform. The beard and the make-up came away with miraculous speed. With an effort, Barney calmed his hands. "I'm going out," he said, "for a sandwich." He seemed to hear the voice from somewhere else. It was too normal to be his own.

"More pictures tonight?" the man asked.

"Yes. Another hour at least."

"I could use some food myself."

Barney's smile was fully controlled. He discovered so in his mirror, wiping Edmund from his face, line by line.

In his street clothes Barney walked out the stage door and kept going. He did not know what he would do if the outer guard followed him, but the answer would come to him at the right moment. It always had. He was aware that a tightening knot was drawing about him in this town, but it did not frighten him any more.

There was a greater concern in his mind tonight, something he must know about himself, about the violent male forces within him. His whole life, piling up behind him, was driving him forward toward the answer.

The guard from upstairs came down to talk to the guard at the stage door. There was a brief discussion of the departing actor before one of the deputies, who had missed his dinner, decided to follow.

Willard Pruitt threw down his pencil, and crossed his arms, letting his head sag wearily against his chest. He felt good, but he felt tired.

Twenty-four hours, less five for sleep, and he was still not sure the answer was right.

He took the double list he had made and folded it very carefully. Five unaccountable deaths by drowning, male. Five separate communities from Vermont to Colorado. Draw a circle around each one, and within the circle was a summer theatre . . . or a university. Find an actor who had played at every theatre, attended each university,

and there was only one choice possible. Only one man who had been at the right places at the right time. . . .

Pruitt looked at the telephone and then at the clock and shook his head. Sleep was the chief's only indulgence. Let him have it.

Feeling the need for action he picked up a wire report, carefully re-read it, and lifted a phone from its hook. "Willard Pruitt, Cascade City. I want to put through a call to the Illinois State Police, Criminal Investigation. . . . Right now. Call me back. . . ."

Pruitt was assembling his papers when Dan Whitaker walked into the outer office. Pruitt pressed the button, admitting him. Whitaker lifted a long leg over the corner of a desk, riding his elbow on the knee.

"Making progress, Willard?"

"Some. Have you anything to tell me?"

Whitaker smiled. "All right, my story first. . . ."

Carefully he detailed the incidents of the evening—the breaking of the dressing-room mirror and his own discussion of Edmund the bastard's philosophy with Barney Sewell. Finally, word for word, he went over his long-distance phone call.

Pruitt repeated the name: "Charles DeWitt Ellis?"

"Yes. He was Barney's last director, the man who recommended him to us."

Pruitt had scribbled a few notes as Whitaker spoke. He looked them over. "And this man, Ellis, says that Barney claimed his father was an actor?"

Whitaker nodded.

"That's interesting. When a case really begins to break it moves fast. Never knew it to fail." Pruitt walked to the window and looked out on the deserted square. "I'm putting through a call to the Illinois police right now. There are still some gaps, but I do know that Barney was adopted as a boy by an Irene Sewell under her maiden name."

"Where is the mother now?"

"Dead."

Whitaker nodded. "I remember that was on his record."

Pruitt looked around, sharply. "Did his record say how she died?"

"No."

"She was a suicide." Pruitt looked off in the direction of Main Street Bridge. The eternal roar of the Cascade was so normal that a man never heard it, until he stopped to listen. "Drowned herself," Pruitt said.

There was a long silence.

"When did that happen?"

"While Barney was overseas entertaining troops. He was rejected by the regular army."

"For psychological reasons?"

"I don't have that information yet."

Whitaker's mind, as usual, was moving ahead rapidly, filling the gaps. "Let's assume he was, Willard. That means he was a mixed-up boy before he went overseas. While he's gone his mother kills herself, and this trouble of his, whatever it is, begins to grow."

"Could be. All the crimes occurred after his mother's death."

"Crimes? Then there have been others? Charles Ellis mentioned one near his school that seemed to fit—"

"Yeah, I have that one down." Pruitt explained Barney Sewell's movements in relationship with five similar deaths.

"The victims? Were they all actors?" Whitaker asked shrewdly.

"No. It must go deeper than that, Mr. Whitaker."

The director released a long, inaudible whistle. "Seems to me it's about time to move, Willard."

Pruitt hitched his gun belt. "I was thinking the same thing."

Barney Sewell had never been inside the Cascade Hotel. He walked straight to the magazine rack in the lounge, ignoring a glance of inquiry from the night clerk, who

thought he recognized Barney as one of the actors in the habit of making a clubhouse out of the lobby. Barney stood, slouching, fists buried in his pockets, recognizing his problem and its answer almost instantly with his rare actor's gift for quick decision. He was excited, not by the danger of his position—he had ceased thinking of personal danger a long time ago—but rather by the near culmination of the night and the summer and all the summers of his adult life.

He noted that the clerk could observe the side door only by standing on tiptoe. To mount the stairs without being seen he must be able to open that door without attracting attention. At this hour the door was only a safety exit, not an entrance.

Barney's big hand closed over a small pocket magazine. He walked to the exit and opened the door slowly, noting the faint sound of the hinges. The clerk was busy; his head failed to appear above the barrier.

In a single swift motion Sewell wedged the magazine tightly between the door and the lower sill. A passer by would never notice the tiny filament of space which kept the latch from closing.

He returned to the magazine stand within the clerk's range of vision. With an effort he managed to control his impatience, stepping into a public phone booth, pretending to dial a number. Five minutes later he left the hotel and walked a half-block to the all-night lunch counter. It was here on the public terrace that Ethel Tucker had first selected him from the crowd and spoken to him in her friendly way. He still carried that impression deeply in his mind—the hoarse quality of her voice, the unintentional pressure of her soft breasts against him—a theme of intimacy haunting his days and his long, restless summer nights.

A policeman sat inside at the counter studiously ignoring him. Barney ordered food through the catering window and sat on the terrace eating without the slightest sensation of taste. The coffee scalded his tongue and

throat. He saw the policeman leaving with a bag of sandwiches but failed to connect the man logically with himself. When his mind was powerfully engaged with an idea he ruled out all distractions. He had the white purse in his lap and his big hand kept turning it over and over. Each time his thumb pressed the shiny latch he hesitated, withdrawing the hand, because the thing he contemplated was not yet fully clear to him. It was as if there had been two watchmen moving through the summer nights, himself and another like himself, and the second had grown in a few hours to appalling dimensions. It was this second force, driving him forward beyond all chance of withdrawal, that actuated him now.

He left the restaurant, alert enough to know that Main Street was unpatrolled while the main group of actors was still at the theatre, cunning enough to circle a block by way of darker side streets and approach the hotel through an alley, arriving finally at the side door. His hand rested on the latch, and the door came open without a sound. Slipping inside he picked up the crumpled magazine and let the door inch shut behind him. The clerk had not heard him. In three long strides he was out of sight on the carpeted stairway, tossing the magazine aside when he turned into the second flight, hurrying faster and faster, his hand pulling the white bag from under his shirt, removing the key. At the fifth floor he found the room and passed through the door like a ghost without consciously having used the key at all.

In the sudden darkness his confidence returned. This was his element. He moved in free space, with unbounded imagination. He traced along a wall toward the ribbed shadow of a Venetian blind, found the bedpost, and his hand passed lightly, tenderly across the pillow and down the smooth linen coverlet. He went over the whole room with his hands until every part of it was familiar.

He sat on the bed, smelling the subtle fragrance of the girl in the room. Her tiny handbag was crushed in his hand, and he raised it absently to his lips. A sweet powdery

smell came from within. His fingers groped inside it, removing a handkerchief, which he slowly crumpled in his fist. Somehow its laciness was like the fragile substance of a life in the powerful grip of his hand, a woman's life. He opened the hand, and the handkerchief floated delicately on his palm. Gently, he pressed it back into the bag.

He remembered the key. In his haste he had left it in the door. He stepped across the room, angry with himself, the actor who had missed a vital cue.

He began to think again, calmly. It was clear to him now that the impulsive theft of the purse would defeat his own purpose. The clerk would have to let the girl in. If there was any suspicion at all the room would be searched. There was no place in the world for him to see her but here—he knew that—but his only chance that she would be alone was to get the key back to her.

This was a cue for action. He worked out the whole thing as he moved, leaving the door of her room unlocked, replacing the key in her purse, slipping down the stairs with incredible speed, finding the magazine again, silently replacing it in the door. In less than a minute of time he was vanishing in an alley on his way back to the theatre.

Arriving on the dark hillside above the amphitheatre wall, he could see Whitaker and Fallon and Pomeroy at stage left in earnest discussion with two police officers. The beautiful view of the open stage, of the theatre pit crowded with costumed actors, was like a live glimpse into another age. Briefly it held him there in a state of uneasy balance on the edge of time and space. He felt again the desperate urge to give up, now, to come out of the darkness into the light; but the thought passed in a single stride, for he saw the girl, Cordelia, a lone slim white figure under the lights, and that remembered fragrant lacy softness lingered on the flesh of his hand.

He saw Ollie Van Horn's car parked on the steep slant of the street. He ran down, tossing the purse into the open rear seat.

Determined now, beyond any turning back, he made his way in darkness as he had come, through the alley and the silent hotel door, and up the carpeted stairs.

6

Tony Riordan was sitting on the stage rail, watching Cordelia in the arms of Lear under the sharp white camera lights, when Mitch Fallon appeared suddenly at his shoulder. Fallon took the Englishman by the arm, leading him back to a grassy incline where Paul Enright lay at full length, staring at the sky.

"Paul, can you learn lines under pressure?" the director asked.

Enright rose on one elbow. "I found out the other night I can do almost anything—under pressure."

"Good. Instead of Kent, the ageing hero, how would you like to be the young hero?"

"I don't get it, Mitch. You mean I should take Tony's place as Edgar?"

"Right. You have the stature and the voice. The Poor Tom scenes may be rough for you, but you can do it, Paul. Will you?"

"If you say so."

"Dan Whitaker can play Kent. He and I have talked over the understudy problem before. Dan claims to be an idiot at learning lines, but we're lucky—he already knows Kent's lines. In fact, he knows the whole play."

"The village idiot," Tony Riordan said, affably. "That takes care of Kent and Edgar. Where does it leave me?"

Fallon stared past the wall at the slender treetops, tossed by a rising midnight wind. "You know, I had a foreboding this summer would go bad. *Lear* is too big a show for anybody."

"Mitch?" Riordan persisted. "Am I being canned?"

Fallon dropped a hand affectionately on the Englishman's arm. "You might call it a promotion," Tony. We need an Edmund, and I want you to do it."

"Edmund?" The Englishman's only sign of emotion was the hardening of the muscles along his jaw. He tried to speak, cleared his throat, and failing, walked away from the other men saying nothing at all. . . .

A state police car roared into town from the north at high speed, a sound of emergency in the night. Tires whistled turning into the square. Just outside the theatre other tires could be heard skidding noisily on the gravel drive.

Mitch Fallon saw the excitement spreading in whispers through the pit. He called the whole cast on stage.

At that moment Dan Whitaker was meeting Willard Pruitt outside the gate. Pruitt's police car was parked in the middle of the drive, motor running, red light flashing.

"Well, we missed him, damn it," Pruitt said. "Bad timing. He was last seen eating a sandwich at the Hub—ten minutes before I got there. You think Sewell knew what was coming?"

Whitaker nodded, describing Mitch Fallon's decision to disarm the duelists, Edgar and Edmund.

"A good idea," Pruitt admitted, "but Sewell must have guessed what was behind that. He's no fool, no ordinary criminal, either; I've seen him on the stage."

"No, not a criminal. Criminals make their own choice, Willard; they live out of bounds because it's the easiest way. There's a better word than 'criminal' for Barney."

"What word, Mr. Whitaker?"

"Illegitimate."

By the window on the fifth floor of the hotel, Barney Sewell looked down through the slant of the blinds. His high state of elation slowly gave way to a sensation of utter loneliness. The silence pressed in on him, weakening his determination. Beyond the window ledge there was no railing, nothing but night and space. Night and space.

He sat on the bed and pressed his face in his hands, and there was no distinction between the two darknesses, within and without.

Outside the theatre, Willard Pruitt was assigning deputies as escorts. "First, we take care of the innocent, then we get around to the guilty," he told the directors, Fallon and Whitaker. "Later I want to see you men at the station."

Dan Whitaker, moving quickly, managed to pull his long legs into the big patrol car while Pruitt expertly reversed it and drove out an alley to the street, parking near the box office behind Ollie Van Horn's convertible. The red spotlight flashed on five startled faces. Whitaker followed when Pruitt walked forward. They saw Ethel Tucker holding up a white leather bag.

"Here's my purse," she said. "I'm really getting absent-minded."

She was exploring the purse's contents when the two men leaned against opposite doors of the open car.

"After that trouble the other night you people are number one on my list," Pruitt told the Enrights. "I don't like to scare people, but it's better than taking chances. We don't know if this man's motive was personal. We don't even know if he had a motive that you and I could understand, but he tried once and missed. To me that means he's more dangerous than ever."

Glory Enright laid her head on her husband's shoulder, her hair a drifting pattern of mysterious colours in the unnatural red light. "What could he have against us?" she asked. "What have we done?"

"These things can't be explained to normal people," Pruitt said, with authority, "but we know in two nights it hasn't changed."

"Ah, but it has!" Dan Whitaker said.

"How do you figure?"

"Now they are married."

"So we are," Paul said aggressively, "and so we have been all summer."

"Not to him, not the night he was out there watching you," Whitaker reminded. "That little social item had not been reported yet, Paul. To him you were the boy and the girl, not the man and the wife."

Pruitt made a beckoning motion with his shoulder. Whitaker followed him and a few feet from the car Pruitt spoke to him in a whisper:

"I'm afraid my language is gonna get a little too technical for the ladies, Mr. Whitaker."

"Don't be stuffy, Willard."

"I may be stuffy, but you sound a little crazy to me. I been in this business ten years, and I never heard of a sex criminal who restricted himself to virgins."

"After your herculean labour of the past twenty-four hours, Willard, you should be able to answer that yourself."

Pruitt was briefly silenced. He shifted his weight from one booted foot to another. "Yeah, I get it. The victims that we know of were all men. That takes care of the girl problem, but I could swear, Whitaker—take the people who're involved in this—there must be a sex angle."

"I agree, Willard."

"What is it, then—jealousy?"

"That's unlikely. There were two girls involved here and possibly many others in those similar cases. Jealousy is an individual thing. Only a superman would regard himself as a rival of every young lover he meets."

"That's a thought—" A sharp blast on the convertible's horn interrupted them. Pruitt turned back to the car.

Whitaker stood alone, not moving. From his lapel he drew a long pin and held it up in the red light, studying the shiny white bead which was its head.

"What are the orders, Lieutenant?" Van Horn demanded.

"Don't let the chief hear you passing out promotions." Pruitt grumbled. "He don't even like to do it himself."

"I'll speak to the mayor," Ollie said. "What's the sleeping order for tonight?"

Pruitt rubbed his jaw. "You people got an extra cot at your cabin?"

The Enrights nodded in unison. Pruitt made a quick decision and assigned Van Horn to stay with them. "If two of you can't handle this man, we're gonna need the marines. I'll have some patrols cruising that area."

The convertible took off in the manner of a rocket. Pruitt and Whitaker followed, catching up again at the hotel, where the policeman stepped forward to find the five in a state of shocked silence.

"These things happen. It's hard to believe they do when you know the guy in trouble," he said, understanding the twisted loyalty that might make these young people feel more grief than fear.

Pruitt escorted the Englishman and Ethel Tucker into the hotel lobby, waiting until the clerk joined them in the elevator. "Stay indoors," he said, waving his hand in salute, without smiling, as the door closed on the scowling young man and the pale-faced girl.

He was still there when the clerk came down, a thin elderly man with a grey moustache.

"You leave the desk like this very often?" Pruitt asked.

"Only," the man said coldly, "when we have a policeman in the lobby."

"How do people get upstairs?"

"When I run the elevator I lock the front door."

Pruitt nodded. "Remember any calls tonight for that pair who just went up?"

The clerk licked his lips. "Any calls?" he said. "No."

"Any visitors upstairs tonight?"

The man drew back his head stiffly as if a hand were forcibly pressing against his jaw. "I don't think I am required to discuss—"

"We got a killer in this town!" Pruitt snapped. "You ever heard about the dead boy in the park? I want to know if any man who don't belong here has been up those stairs."

"No, sir," the clerk said, swallowing.

"All right." Pruitt walked to the door. "Lock it up."

"What?"

"Lock the front door. This killer I'm talking about happens to specialize in men. Do you keep a gun back there?"

"Y-yes. In the vault."

Pruitt smiled. "Well, you're not likely to need it. This man doesn't use one. If you see anything funny just pick that phone off the hook and yell police."

Pruitt thought of describing the killer, but the clerk might be better off not knowing. He was badly shaken already.

A minute after the policeman left the clerk remembered there had been two men from the Shakespeare troupe in the lobby tonight. His hand was reaching for a plug on the switchboard when he also remembered that both men had used the public telephone.

He shrugged, walked uneasily to the door, and looked out into the midnight quiet of the street.

On the fifth floor Barney Sewell's instinctive gift for timing had warned him that the girl should be home.

Home.

He had come up off the bed with a start, aware how completely alien he was to this room, what a shock it would be to the girl to meet him here. He would not be able to communicate. In a whole summer he had not penetrated that veil which separated her, the living, from himself, the dead, for he alone knew that he was not a part of life and never had been.

And yet all of his feelings were live; his hands were live, they moved, responded, felt hot and cold; but he had never known the miracle sensation of life's beginning, only the darker miracle of its ending.

The girl would not understand him this way. Their meeting must be reasonable, or it might turn into another one of his long nightmares.

He had stepped out of the room and closed the door behind him, moving up and down the carpeted hall, mumbling like an actor rehearsing his entrance cue, when he heard the elevator door in motion and the sound of voices—a woman's and a man's. Instantly his mind plunged from self-concern into a darkness where he moved easily with long familiarity. He ran up the sixth-floor stairs.

Tony Riordan, respectfully silent, walked arm in arm with the girl, guiding her past the stairway which led to his own room, past the door of 507, all the way to the end of the hall, where another wing branched right to the front of the hotel.

Their voices were very low, intimate. She was so tall that her eyes were level with his own, and her mouth with his, and the long blond hair that danced on the bare curve of her shoulder was directly opposed to a nervous trembling muscle in his own throat.

He leaned forward. Their lips touched lightly and coolly together. "If you think it's wrong for us to be together now at a crucial time in our lives," he said, "then I may be wrong about us."

"Oh, dear, do we have to make an issue of this?"

"Yes, I think we do."

"But why?"

"Because you don't know love until you've known it in a condition of crisis. I remember a time in the war when I almost drowned. The only thought in my mind was waste, what a rotten waste; but if I had known you then, I am sure the thing in my mind would be something of you, something I would have for ever."

"Well, that certainly would be a crisis, Tony. You make yourself quite clear."

"Not quite," he said. His arms slipped around her.

Moving urgently forward she seemed to leap up at him. He pressed her back and back into the recess of the fire exit, neither of them observing the man who stepped

down from the higher stairway and glided along the corridor, his dark eyes narrow and level and cold, across the light to the darkness behind the door of 507, which he silently locked behind him.

Ethel's breath came out in a long, exhausted sigh: "All the way to the bottom of the sea!"

"Let's forget that story," he said. "I may have been overdoing it—"

"I don't intend to forget."

"But tonight you should not be alone, Ethel, nor I."

"Tony, honestly, I don't see how—"

"This is important," he said aggressively. "Not just the danger, but the crisis. There's a lost man, and he's one of ours."

"Tony, I know." She turned away from him, hiding the quick change in her face from excitement to anxiety. "I—I may even know who it is."

Looking down, leaning her head lightly on his arm, she told him of her frightening experience in the theatre vanity room. "It was like—" she said, hesitating, trying to control the tremor in her voice—"like a little boy who had lost his mother. . . ."

7

He made sure that she was safely inside the door of 507, observing for himself that the night latch was on. At the stairway going up to his room the Englishman paused. Ethel was right, of course. His argument for sharing a crisis did not make allowances for the crisis which superseded all others. They could not think of love and sympathy and terror all in one night. One emotion must dominate, and he was sure with the last lingering pressure of her lips which emotion that would be. But he could not go upstairs alone. The thought of men guarding his sleep was absurd. He was one of them.

Leaving the hotel he was reminded by the night clerk that a killer was in the streets.

Killer. He thought of the armoured Edmund who had faced him tonight, the dark eyes behind the visor, the vicious cuts of invisible steel. Thank God for Mitch Fallon's intuition in eliminating the swords, but what could Sewell have against himself, against Tony Riordan, Edgar, brother, friend?

The thought arrested him in midstride. He remembered Ethel's story of the man Edmund on his knees, embracing her.

Turning uneasily, Riordan found himself entirely alone in the street. More than with himself he was concerned with that girl alone in her room, with the possible connection between her story and the confusion of a murderer. Abruptly, he cut across the street to the bus station. He ordered coffee and sat for a moment trying to think of any excuse for calling that would not sound like the last try of an impatient lover.

Ethel Tucker spun the shower handles. Water flooded down into the tub, filling the tiny room with a cloud of steam and a deafening roar. She unbuttoned her dress and shivered out of it, thinking of what a close thing it had been that moment when Tony had wanted to come in and search her room, had in fact stepped inside, and the lingering instant when she stopped him with her hand; he must have felt her indecision, but he did not come any farther. He had said: "Well, I guess it's all right; good night, Ethel," and left, closing the door behind him while she stood there in the dark, not realizing for a moment he was gone or what exactly had been the feeling expressed in his voice. She had walked straight into the bathroom and shut the door behind her, feeling secure here with her back against the door in the spotless tiled cleanliness. Secure from him but not from herself, she decided, and wasn't it ridiculous to think of placing a door between herself and him, ever?

Barney Sewell stepped from behind the window drape and circled the bed. Through the thin wall he could hear the roar of the shower. His movements were faltering, uneven, as if the earth were washing away beneath his feet.

The sound suddenly stopped, and he turned with a rigid physical effort, facing the door. At that moment the phone rang, diverting him again. Leaping across the room he vanished behind the drape.

Ethel had turned off the shower. Lukewarm water drained pleasantly down the length of her body. She heard the phone and jumped, slipping dangerously on the surface of the tub. She towelled herself rapidly, feeling a dampness and a warmth and a lingering excitement. Opening the door, she hesitated and took an instant longer to slip into her housecoat. Through the door the light slanted straight across the carpet to the telephone stand. She ran to the phone. Glancing self-consciously at the slanted blinds of the window she moved out of the ray of light.

There was no doubt in her mind whose voice she would hear, but another kind of doubt stepped up the beat of her heart.

"Ethel?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't get you out of my mind."

"It's all right. I was having the same trouble. I'll never go to sleep now."

"Nor I. That's why I'm not trying."

She wanted to know more about that, and he tried to explain what had taken him out into the night.

"Tony, I wish you'd come home," she said anxiously.

There was a prolonged quiet. She seemed almost to hear his close breathing, as if the phone projected his male presence physically into her room, yet there was only a dead silence on the wire.

"Do you mean that?" he said.

Sitting on the stand, she extended her foot and kicked

aimlessly at the silk slip which overhung the baseboard of the bed. The intimacy of his voice in her ear was like a delicate thread of life, like nothing she had ever known.

"Yes, of course I mean it."

He did not react precipitately as he might have. "Well," he said, and again the silence seemed to come alive. His nearness was overwhelming. He did not have to cross streets and climb stairs, he merely had to step across the room.

The next thing he said was completely unexpected.

He had made up his mind to go back to England. No chance of changing his citizenship. "A family affliction," he said. "Incurable. I thought you ought to know."

"Tony, I wouldn't expect you to change your whole life for me."

"Then you put me in the difficult position, darling, of asking you to do that very thing for me."

"Now? Are you asking me now?"

"Is there such a thing as time any more? Haven't I been asking you every day, all summer?"

She had to think. She had to get her mind clear. She pressed her hand over her heart, and the gesture startled her, the soft warm pressure emphasizing that this was a terribly vital moment, one that he would have called a "crisis."

"Yes," she said.

"Did you say—yes?"

"Yes."

"Does that mean—"

"It means—yes."

She closed her eyes, and she could hear him moving restlessly in the phone booth, as if the light had gone out for them and he was with her now beyond any imaginary doubts. This was how it would be, exactly.

"I'm coming home," he said.

She lowered the receiver, conscious of the cold hardness of it in her hand. Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"Tony!" It was only a whisper but a violent one. He was waiting with his wonderful gift of restraint for her final word.

"No," she said.

"What?" Now it was his voice that seemed lost.

"No, no, no. I mean I—I can't see you tonight."

"Oh." A sound of violent relief came audibly over the wire.

"Don't ask me to explain, Tony. It's just—the way I am."

"Right . . . and the way you are is what I fell in love with the first day I saw you."

"Thank you, darling, for saying that. I love you. Good night. . . ."

Willard Pruitt was on a long-distance connection with Springfield, Illinois, when Tony Riordan walked into the police station. Four men—Police Chief Searcy and the three Festival directors—sat on opposite sides of a small table. The men were talking quietly, almost amiably, with varying attitudes of relief, as if the final capture of Barney Sewell, a foregone conclusion, now belonged to the past. A bad dream. An unpleasant memory.

The chief found an extra chair for Riordan, and he was quickly absorbed into the conversation. Dan Whitaker did most of the talking until Willard Pruitt turned away from the phone, rocking back in his swivel chair. There was a look on his face of wanting to plant the heels of his boots on the table, but the chief was frowning at him, chewing reflectively on a cigar, his reddish cheeks blackened with a growth of midnight beard.

"Check one," Pruitt said, holding up a finger: "Barney's mother was never married. His father was a travelling actor on the old Chautauqua circuit—not yet identified by name. That makes Barney exactly what he was in your play, Mr. Fallon—the illegitimate son."

Anthony Riordan, Edgar of Gloucester, bowed his

head against his hands . . . Edmund, brother. How many times had he seen Edmund there on the stage addressing the dark eternal night of his private universe? "Fine word—'legitimate'!"

"Check two," Pruitt said, elevating a second finger: "His mother's family gave her a bad time. Kicked her out of the house. She was abandoned with the kid for the rest of her life. Not a very nice set-up, I gather, but she kept the boy alive."

Of all the men, Mitchell Fallon was the most deeply depressed. He spoke with considerable effort. "Was his mother a mental case?"

"No evidence of that," Pruitt said, "unless you call suicide a form of insanity. She was living alone when she drowned herself."

Chief Searcy cleared his throat. He had missed out somewhere. Where and how did the boy become a murderer?

"Check three." Willard Pruitt leaned forward in the creaking swivel chair: "Barney was engaged to be married when he came back from overseas. The marriage never came off. The Illinois police have talked to the girl involved. She is cagey on the reason, but my guess is that Barney told her he was illegitimate and she wouldn't have him. On the record, I'd say it was the year of these two big events—mother's death and broken engagement—that Barney first killed a man."

"You think it was a crack-up?" the chief said. "Not something he inherited from his father?"

"We know what he inherited from his father," Pruitt snapped. "He is a born actor, they tell me, but we know he's also a born zero!"

Ethel finished brushing her hair before the bathroom mirror. Soft and fragrant, it fell full length down the curve of her shoulders into the lacy bosom of her gown. She switched off the light and stepped into the bedroom. Street light filtered thinly through the blinds. Against

the black and white bars she saw the broken outline of a man's head and shoulders. He was sitting on the bed.

She backed against the bathroom door, and it closed with a snap.

She did not cry out. The shock was too great. She tried to speak sternly, to demand what he was doing there, but she could not.

She was not afraid, not angry, but her own life, so important as she entered the room, ceased to have any meaning the moment she saw him. . . .

"The man was always his victim," Dan Whitaker was saying, "because the man was always guilty. To Barney his mother was blameless. She was the sufferer, and as she suffered her son suffered too. When she drowned herself Barney turned cold. He turned against his father, unknown and nameless, the guilty man. Every time he killed a man he killed all the potential nameless, haunted, outcast souls like himself. They would never have to know the experience of living outside the bounds of common humanity."

The chief's eyes were drawn irresistibly to his own gun belt hanging on the wall. "Willard, have you got all our men working in pairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Keep it that way. I want to take Sewell alive if we can, but not with any more dead men on his record."

Dan Whitaker hooked his heel on his own chair, bringing his knee up to his chin. "Your policemen are safe enough, John," he told the chief. "Surely you recognize the type of man who was always his victim?"

"Can't say that I do."

Whitaker spoke very carefully. "Barney was born an outcast because of love, summer love, the passing kind. Whenever he saw the same thing happening again he took upon himself the task of divine intervention. Barney would not use that word 'divine' in an arrogant sense. I

think he recognized that Edmund, the bastard, was evil—but what is evil if not the instrument of the gods?"

Tony Riordan drove his fist again and again and again into the palm of his hand. None of these men could know what this conversation was doing to him. He shut his eyes, and Whitaker's voice seemed to reach him from a distance. " . . . The lover was Barney's victim, because he could shape his father, the unknown, into any image he chose, and he chose the image of guilt—the invader, the violating lover."

Ethel was sure how the visitor had gained access to her room. She had not locked the door herself; it was as simple as that.

Her mind was quite clear now. She must force herself to speak, to try to make him understand. It was absurd to tell him he should not have come. They were far beyond that now.

"I have to be what I am," she said in a thin, high voice. "You can't want me to be anything else, Tony. I decided for myself how it must be. Nobody tells us what to do. We have to be what we are."

She was not getting through to him at all, because he said nothing. He just sat there looking at her. Or was he looking out the window?

There was a chair against the wall. She found it and sat down. It was bad that he had come but worse that he would not speak to her.

At that moment she realized she was not disappointed but afraid, and the fear was growing.

At the station, Chief John Searcy was trying to build a logical process out of incoming reports. Barney Sewell, he said, had left the theatre early, ignoring Mitch Fallon's instructions, possibly knowing that he was under suspicion—but eating a sandwich at a downtown restaurant was not the behaviour of a hunted man, unless it was meant to mislead the policeman who had followed him.

From there Sewell had very neatly disappeared. His landlady was sure he had not come home. None of his personal belongings were missing.

If he had left town there was no visible means of transport. On foot he would not stand a chance.

"He was short of money too," Willard Pruitt said. "The girl at the Hub remembers he had to fish through his pockets to find cash for the sandwich."

Mitch Fallon agreed with a sad twisted smile: "That was Barney. We get the type once in a while—odd jobs, any kind of a living, just to be with the theatre."

"Stagestruck," the chief grumbled. "That means he had a pair of hobbies. It's too damn bad he couldn't have stuck with acting."

The chief was obviously not trying to be funny. His temper had gone beyond that. He moved impatiently about the room, the natural red of his face deepening to an angry purple.

"We must bear in mind that Barney is really two men," Dan Whitaker said. "The theatre is his real inheritance, his normal life. This criminal thing is his non-inheritance—as Willard might say, the *other side of zero*."

The chief paused before a map of the city. He laid a short, calloused finger on a point just below Main Street. "Here's the Hub," he said. "The girl says he went this way, which means he vanished right here at this intersection."

Dan Whitaker leaned forward. "The hotel windows cover that area. Did anyone talk to the clerk?"

Pruitt immediately reached for his telephone. "I muffed that one," he said ruefully. "I talked to him about the inside of the hotel, but I failed to mention the outside."

While Pruitt waited for the operator, Whitaker spoke to the chief: "Your schedule follows all the normal evidence, John. I think we should go over the abnormal, beginning with that broken mirror—"

Tony Riordan, waiting intently for the result of Pruitt's call, suddenly remembered that he had failed to tell these men why he came. Carefully, not elaborating, he described Barney's behaviour with Ethel Tucker in the vanity room. As he spoke, his eyes on Whitaker's, their minds seemed to work in unison, and both men rose to their feet.

"We should have had this before, Tony. It marks a change," Whitaker said. "Barney has never shown the slightest interest in women, but he may have avoided them for a reason."

The Englishman angrily stroked his hand through the dark unruly waves of his hair. "Sorry. I should have recognized how important this was."

Pruitt had the hotel on the phone. "Yes?" he said. "Yes? When? Where did he go?" He dropped the phone. "Get this! Sewell was there at the hotel, either before or after the time he was seen at the Hub."

"Which direction was he going?" the chief demanded.

"Not outside. He was inside the hotel."

"Inside?" Tony Riordan jumped, gripping the big policeman by the arm. Every man in the room was on his feet.

"He was only in the lobby," Pruitt said evenly. "He went in to use the public phone."

"Take it easy. I'll handle this." The chief threw back his heavy sloping shoulders. "This don't connect him with anything particular. Pruitt, call the long-distance operator, try to check Sewell's call. He has no friends in this town that we know of. . . ."

One man had dominated Ethel's thought to the exclusion of all others. Now, drifting from one extreme of horror to another, she saw that this could not possibly be Tony Riordan. She should have known at once. On the phone Tony had been himself. Here he was not.

She was helpless, locked in with the man, and the image grew.

She sat between two doors, but they might as well be

miles away. She could not run or hurry; she could not possibly control her hands to turn the latch.

She was sure now that she recognized him. She closed her eyes tightly like a frightened child, and her mind moved freely as in a child's nightmare. She saw again the man embracing her, humbly, but more vivid than that was the memory of his hand stroking her hair gently, chastely. Intuition, heightened by fear, told her very clearly that this was the first, the very *first* intimacy he had ever known. Then she knew he was a child himself, and if she could keep him so and be a child with him, not a woman, not let him know that he had merely to cross the room and exert his strength. . . .

I am a child too—it was like a chant now in her mind, innocent, innocent, thank God I am innocent. . . .

Tony Riordan reached a decision. He was not waiting for advice from anyone. He went out the door of the police station without a word.

A half-block along Main Street, Dan Whitaker caught up with him, breathing like an exhausted miler. "I'm not equipped for this sort of thing."

"I should never have left her," Riordan said.

Whitaker kept stride with a heroic effort. "Why did you, Tony?"

"Propriety!"

"Interesting point," Whitaker gasped. "Makes a very neat summary of Barney's life: 'All that I am, propriety made me.' "

"What if he reasons out where he is wrong, Whitaker? What if he suddenly chuck the whole crazy idea and begins to look at himself—"

"And finds a man, like his father, like all the others? Then I'd say we're headed in the right direction."

Riordan broke into a run. When Whitaker came puffing along behind him, Riordan was pounding the hotel door with the open palm of his hand. The clerk ran across the lobby.

Inside the door Riordan caught a few deep breaths. "I'd feel better if I talked to her," he said, more calmly.

Whitaker nodded. "We've no reason to go beating on her door scaring the girl to death."

"I'll phone her," Riordan decided, "just to be sure."

In years of hotel work the clerk had never spent a night like this. He took aim three times before his shaking hand could drive the telephone plug into its socket.

She almost fainted at the explosive sound of the phone in the room. At least the shock wakened her from a state of nightmare to a condition of reality. The phone rang again. It might keep ringing. She was not sure, if she willed to answer, that anything would happen. She was in a near state of collapse. Even if she cried for help, it would be like crying doom because he needed only to extend his hand—

The thought of that immediate physical danger brought a sob into her throat, but she managed to withhold the sound. She could not let him know she was afraid. Reason is the master of unreason, and she must seem to be in control.

This was the best thought that could have come to her for it carried with it some of the physical sensations of control. Her hands would move as she willed them. She could hold them before her face and see them responding.

The telephone was maddening. It would have to be answered. This might be Tony, persisting. Not answering would alarm him, bring him rushing downstairs.

Now she had found the real secret of courage. Tony was in greater danger than she. The man might not kill a woman, but he would a man. He had killed a man before.

To reach the phone she must move even closer to him. If she could do that she could do anything.

She stood up, and the thin gown trailed whispering across the rug.

Riordan held the desk phone in his hand, watching the clerk's finger press down the switch. Four, five—

It was impossible that the man could have got near her, into her room. Insane.

Six, seven. Riordan considered slamming the phone down, running, and then, distantly, he heard:

“Hello.”

He brought the receiver back with a snap of his wrist.
“Ethel?”

“Yes.” Very far away, her voice. Must have been fast asleep.

“This is Tony. I’m sorry. I was worried.”

“Tony, I—”

“I never did take a look at your room, you know.”

“I wish you— Tony, you must not come to my room alone. You know that. I’m afraid . . . not alone . . . it would not be—right. Tony—”

She seemed confused, her voice fading away completely.

“Well, I had to know you’re all right. Good night again. . . .”

He waited for her to answer, and there was nothing but the click of the receiver closing.

She had heard the man breathing behind her. With the last strength of her wrist she guided the receiver back to its stand.

The light switch was on the wall, but her hand moving numbly toward it, drew back defensively against her breast. She could not bring light into the room with them, not as she was. The only dividing line between them was the thin wall of darkness which neither had broken with a sound or a sign of recognition.

All she could do now was turn and face him.

She shrank against the wall. He was no longer visible on the bed. Was this only an illusion?

Then she saw him standing, a deep shadow in the middle of the room. He was between her and both of the

doors. There was no avenue of escape at all. The only escape was locked up within him. What did he really want?

She had spoken for Tony, and she must speak now for herself. She must try. "Will you go . . . please?"

She had said it. She had heard her own tiny child's voice, the whisper in the cupboard, let me out, let me out, but he had not moved. His arms seemed to be lifted, strangely extended. It was not a blind motion, not a groping toward the door. It was directed straight toward herself, and he had not said a word.

If he would leap at her, she could resist or give up or die, but this silence was unbearable. If he did not speak, she was going to scream.

She bit down hard on her trembling lower lip and turned her head against the wall, not knowing that the light through the blinds reflecting on the thin silk of her gown formed a misty halo about her.

Her strength seemed to fade away against the wall, not all at once, not quickly enough to avoid the thing she feared most, the thing she had experienced once before but not completely recognized—that sensitive hand lightly stroking her hair, the child hand, shy, the secret hand.

This could not be happening to her, but it did happen. In a moment she would lose her mind and still somewhere she found enough sanity to recognize finally what this was, to realize that this brief nightmare for her had existed for him always and now was the awakening. One must not wake too quickly, but gently, gently. The infinitesimal ghost of a human feeling, that unbearably modest hand lingered trembling on the softness of her hair and then moved on, and that was the moment she began to scream. . . .

Riordan had replaced the phone, thoughtfully. He stared at it, puzzled by her final words. The very weakness of her denial was like an open invitation, and yet it was

not that. How had she said it? . . . Must not come alone. I'm afraid . . . alone . . . not right. Tony. Please. . . .

She had not used exactly those words, but wasn't the meaning there? Please, I'm afraid.

In front of the hotel, tires rubbed along the curb. Willard Pruitt's patrol car stopped, sliding, the red light flashing. Dan Whitaker unlocked the hotel door and Pruitt brushed past him.

"You ran out on us," Pruitt said. "The chief says there's too damn much of this free-lancing—"

Riordan paid no attention to the interruption. His eyes were travelling upward to the keyboxes directly in front of him. There was her number, 507, and an extra key lying inside.

Then he remembered. . . . He was already moving, rounding the desk, reaching for the key. . . . Her purse. She had lost her purse briefly, found it again in Van Horn's car. Her key was in that purse.

"He's there, by God he's up there!"

Riordan had thrown that over his shoulder, crossing the lobby on a dead run, leaping up the stairs.

Pruitt and Whitaker required only an instant to comprehend. "Call the station," Pruitt shouted at the clerk. He reached the first floor one flight behind the Englishman.

From the fourth-floor stairs, a rising crescendo of screams was audible. An elderly woman, halfway into her robe, stepped into the corridor of the fifth floor as Riordan raced past, almost knocking her down. He had to wipe a dark film from his eyes to see the keyhole. He twisted the knob violently as the key settled, turned, and Willard Pruitt's shoulder hit the door beside him.

They smashed into a confusing darkness. The last scream came from a white heap on the floor. The bathroom door was closed, a thin streak of light flowing under it along the floor.

Riordan stepped to the bed, whipped a blanket off of it and around the girl. He kneeled beside her, gently

stroking her hair until she forced his hand away, taking the hand on her lap between her own hands and holding on to it like a terrified child.

Willard Pruitt pressed against the bathroom door, listening. Drawing his gun, he lifted his boot and drove the heel hard against the lock.

8

On a steel bench under a giant oak Mitch Fallon sat alone, observing the twilight duel on the sloping green.

Tony Riordan stumbled back against the bole of a tree, lowering his sword. "That does it. You've got it right, Paul."

The actors strolled away, and Fallon walked slowly after them. This might not be the greatest opening performance of *King Lear* on record, he thought, but it was likely to be the strangest, with a key scene like the duel of the brothers rehearsed fifteen minutes before curtain time. . . .

Paul Enright approached the second spectator, a small, handsomely tailored woman. He slipped his arm through hers. Paul had not quite recovered from the first surprising glimpse of his mother-in-law at the airport. She seemed very youthful, in spite of the grey that streaked her auburn hair.

"This is one duel I can never lose, mother. It's framed," he said, "but I'm getting in shape for the big duel back east."

"That does not have to be a duel, Paul. Glory's father is quite reasonable. Of course, I am sure Horace will want you both to finish college."

"Horace may be due for a surprise."

Mrs. Horace Roberts adjusted her gold-framed glasses and carefully examined the self-assured, erect young Elizabethan nobleman. "I wonder," she said, "if my daughter

is old enough to appreciate you. The cheers you hear from row one, Paul, will be mostly mine. . . .”

In the girl's dressing-room Glory Enright finished twisting the blonde hair of Cordelia into two long braids.

Ethel Tucker looked down at the loose unbraided tassels resting lightly on her breast. On the lap of her white gown she discovered a faint streak of greasepaint. Remembering the source, she took a Kleenex and rubbed carefully until the last trace was gone.

She stood up, looking into Glory's eyes, and they threw their arms around each other.

Glory finally stepped back, smiling. “I wish we could be at your wedding.”

“Tony wants it to be in England.”

“We can't afford that, I'm afraid. Paul is going to be terribly strict about money.”

“Then you will afford it some day.”

“Of course . . . Ethel, when we have a baby, can we name it after one of you?”

They both laughed and went outside by the stage door, where the cast was gathering restlessly for the five-minute call. John Pomeroy, a tall and regal Lear, patted Ethel's cheek with a long grey-lined hand. “Don't look so wistful, daughter,” he said. “You don't have to die until the last act.”

He was thinking of Cordelia, not of Ethel Tucker. All of them were involved now in the play, not in themselves. Tony Riordan had not spoken to her all day, moving about, bent over his script, another Edmund.

Ethel stepped through the stage door and found him under the stairs, practising Edmund's soliloquy. “I'll never get it right. I just don't have it,” he said, gloomily, and then with a sudden lift in his voice he asked her: “How many lives do I owe you, darling?”

She knew what he meant, but there was nothing she could say that would be an answer. Instead, she smiled and held up her hand, spreading the fingers.

"That many? I'll have to take that up with Parliament."

She nodded, for they understood each other perfectly, and she told him of Glory Enright's wish for a name for her first child.

"A name?" The smile slowly vanished from Tony's face, and he moved off toward the entrance, absorbed in the character of Edmund.

He's going to be right, she thought. Confident for him, she went out to take her own place in line.

Out front the drums began to beat.

Scene One went off with only a few surprises. After his first exit the Englishman slowly climbed the stairs, satisfied with his memory, but unsure of his acting. He made a few adjustments in costume and came down for Edmund's second entrance.

In the vanity room he could hear Mitch Fallon helping an agitated actor change costumes. He looked in. The bearded actor was Dan Whitaker.

"If Shakespeare were still alive," Whitaker grumbled, "he would never survive this night."

Both men were tugging at a brown boot, pulling it tight on Whitaker's extended leg.

"Dan, you're going great," Fallon argued. "You really have the right feeling for Kent."

"But not the right lines. Did you catch my exit speech, Mitch? That would be a great line in *Macbeth*, where it belongs!"

"Relax, Dan. You're probably the only Shakespearian in the business who can ad-lib from thirty different plays."

"You should have cast Willard Pruitt as Kent. That Pruitt is quite a man."

Fallon nodded, agreeing. "You never know where you'll find good men. Next year we'll be needing a Mark Antony," he said, musingly. "Well—get upstairs and remove that beard, Dan. Tonight we've got a show, even without Barney—"

"And what would we have with him?" Whitaker let go of the boot, staring moodily into a mirror. "You know what happens at those trials, Mitch? They judge a man insane, and that's the end of it, and the end of the man."

"What else would you have them do, Dan?"

Whitaker did not answer directly. "I wish I were Shakespearc, Mitch. I'd make Edmund the hero of my play, the tragic hero, and my villain would not be a man at all but an idea."

"I know, Dan, you make a great advocate, but you're not Shakespeare tonight; you're Kent in disguise."

Fallon gave him a push, and Whitaker went out running. Fallon, moving after him, saw Tony Riordan standing by. He slapped the Englishman on the shoulder and vanished through the stage door.

The cue came, and Riordan moved on stage alone. Something strange was happening to his face and his shoulders. This was for the people, and the people were out there now, looking at him and he at them. He advanced on the audience, placing his foot on the rail, his elbow on his knee, and his black-bearded chin in his hand. A word of Fallon's came to him, and he knew the role he must play—not Edmund, but Edmund's advocate:

"... Why brand they us with base?, with baseness? . . . "

Out front, Mitch Fallon stood in the lower gateway and watched the actor in the white spotlight, straightening, raising his hands in a direct appeal:

"Now, gods, stand up. . . . "

Fallon turned and trotted backstage. He had to tell Dan Whitaker.

